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MEANINGS AND METHODS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

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MEANINGS AND METHODS

OF THE

SPIRITUAL LIFE

BY

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JENNINGS & GRAHAM
CINCINNATI

Printed by
MORRISON & GIBB LIMITED
Edinburgh

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EACH sermon of the following series is complete in itself, and stands without any immediate relation to the rest. But I believe that a certain method of viewing the processes of Christian culture and growth may be discerned as the uniting chain that runs beneath them all. To a more particular study of this method I may some day return.

Our Father, we would find the way home. Though we be travel-stained and weary with wanderings in far countries whither we should never have gone, though we have lost the halo of purity and bear the mark of sin deep upon our hearts, yet we are Thy children, born into Thy love and called by Thy name. So let us find Thee coming to meet us as we return. Hear our pleading and receive us, though it be to the lowest place. We shall be content and blest if we do but see Thy face, for so shall we know of a surety that we are in our Father's house.

Contents

		PAGE
I.	THE TRUE IDEA OF RELIGION—CONVERSION OR CONTROL?	1
II.	THE ALL-INCLUSIVE SECRET	14
III.	PAUL'S METHOD OF GOODNESS	27
IV.	WITNESS, LEADER, COMMANDER	40
V.	SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION	54
VI.	THE SOUL'S CALLING ITS OWN SECRET	68
VII.	PEACE THROUGH GOD'S INTERFERENCE	82
VIII.	A CHRISTIAN CHURCH, BUT CHRIST OUTSIDE	94
IX.	SELF-FINDING THROUGH SELF-SUBJECTION	107
X.	BEGINNING WELL AND FAILING AFTERWARDS	121
XI.	THE CONTRAST OF SPEECH AND DEED	134

PAGE

XII. THREE ATTITUDES OF MIND TOWARDS POSSIBLE SIN 147

XIII. GOD'S LIFE THE MEASURE OF OUR DESTINY 161

XIV. THE VICTORY OF THE GOD-BORN SOUL . 174

XV. CHRIST'S LOVE THE CONSTRUCTIVE FORCE IN LIFE 187

XVI. THE CHRISTIAN'S SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE WORLD 200

XVII. LIFE AT FAR RANGES 212

XVIII. HOW DISCIPLESHIP MADE PAUL VIEW LIFE 225

I

THE TRUE IDEA OF RELIGION—CONVERSION OR CONTROL?

"And it came to pass, when Israel was waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to taskwork, and did not utterly drive them out."—JUDGES i. 28.

WHAT Israel foolishly tried to do with those who were Israel's national enemies is just what people are very often foolishly trying to do with that which is the enemy of their souls. The principle on which Israel attempted to manage the land God had given to them is the principle on which we too frequently attempt to manage our hearts. Israel contented itself with seeking to control what it ought to have got rid of: if the Canaanites could only be reduced to order and kept in their place, surely more extreme measures need not be resorted to; and if there was a possibility of ruling them with a strong hand and a tight rein, no harm could result from allowing them to remain where they were. With a complacent confidence in their own power, with a self-satisfied assurance that there was nothing to be afraid of, the Israelites, when they were waxen strong, "put the Canaanites to taskwork, and did not utterly drive them out."

What are human hearts to do with *their* Canaanites—simply to control them, or utterly to drive them out? What is the true programme for our moral and spiritual life? Do we need simply to be kept in order, to subdue the baser impulses of our nature into some sort of half-reluctant quietude, to bind and chain them in a slavery from which we *hope* they will not escape, or must we submit ourselves to a more radical and a more sweeping change? What is religion to do for us? Is it to supply a system of restraints, and to do nothing more than that, or is it to bring coursing through us some strong winds of purification and to send us through some burning fires of cleansing, by which we may be morally transformed and spiritually re-created? Are the lower elements of us to be kept down and put to taskwork, or are they to be driven utterly out? Is "control," or "conversion," the word?

There are, one may say, the two ways of looking at the moral need and the moral problem of human nature—the taskwork way, so to call it, and the casting-out way. And of the highest importance must it be for each one of us to settle once for all the question for his own heart—Is it enough for me to restrain myself, to keep down and to keep in order whatever is low and base in me, or must I prepare myself to go through a spiritual change which shall utterly expel the old and bring in what is utterly new, and make a man or woman of me in very deed and truth spiritually new-born?

Think first for a few moments of that view of

religion which makes its entire work to consist in *controlling* what is bad or base in us. The idea of religion which seems to possess many of us is just that of a power which is to keep the unruly elements of our nature in order: certainly the conventional religion of the time amounts to no more than that; and if all outward symptoms of rebelliousness can be made to disappear, if every exterior movement and act of wrong can be held in check, religion, it is thought, has fulfilled its purpose and done all that it can do for human life. Further than that, people of ordinary respectability do not think it necessary to go. Of course, the really depraved and the utterly degraded may, it is admitted, need something more drastic: for their ills stronger moral medicines may be required; nor is there, perhaps, any great impropriety in mentioning the word "conversion" in regard to them. But even for them the object aimed at is to train them up to a certain pitch of moral strength, to bring them up to such a point of self-control that they shall be able to keep themselves safely from being dragged into the depths again. For all alike, *that* is religion—so the ordinary estimate of religion appears to take it. When we, at each uprising of an evil instinct within us, spring upon it with quick eye and strong will to beat it back—*then* are we religious. When every faint stirring against good finds us ready, so that, even if for an instant we are somewhat distracted by the rush of the attack, we presently repel it, and drive the wrong into its hiding-place beneath the surface again—*then* are we religious. If we have so schooled

and mastered our hearts that when the voices calling us to sin are heard, and when for a passing moment there does seem to be some sweetness in them still, and in the momentary tumult we are half whirled away to follow their call, we nevertheless pull ourselves up sharply, and with determination say, "No!" —*then* are we religious. To rule our life with a strong hand, to keep the reins stretched tight, to have evil instinct and wrong desire and base passion well in hand—what more than that can a true estimate of religion contain?

But we should repudiate that theory, of course. We believe in conversion. We should repudiate the theory of religion which makes religion to consist in nothing more than control. But then we live too much as though we accepted it. How many of us have set before ourselves, as the goal of our spiritual striving, *this*—the casting out, really the casting out, not the control or the keeping under, but the actual and entire casting out, of all that is evil in our natures, so that it should have no home nor place nor part in us any more? "Help me to resist the baser instincts of my heart," we are always praying. And we need to pray it, God knows how sorely we need it; but even when we pray it we should follow it with this prayer of yet loftier range, "And so cleanse my heart, O God, that there may no more be any baser instincts to resist." For we are not in truth converted until that prayer is answered. Oh! it is a high thing to hope for, I know! For all of us hard and long must the upward progress toward it be: it is not so light a thing for us to drive out our Canaan-

ites as it was for these chosen ones of long ago. But the mistake and the mischief is that we settle down contentedly without trying to drive them out, just as these did. A religion which keeps us from doing anything very wrong—with that we satisfy ourselves: we do not seek for a religion which roots out of us all inclination to anything that is at all wrong. Ay, more than that. What religion should really do for us is, not to make it hard for us to do wrong, not to impart strength to us so that we may be able to keep ourselves from yielding to the wrong; but religion should make it impossible, in the very nature of us, to do or yield to the wrong. Till it has done that, its last work upon us has not been performed. Till it has done that, our Canaanites, sternly though they may be restrained, have not been driven utterly out.

We have not set that before ourselves. What is it, for instance, that we seek for when we remember how many doubtful things, doubtful courses, doubtful actions, there are open to us? We have to pick and choose, to pause and consider, Is this permissible or is that?—we are overshadowed all the time by the possibility that we may make a wrong choice and come to a mistaken decision—and what we expect the influences of religion, the influences of God, to do for us, is to warn us when we are about to go astray, to recall us when we are going to surrender ourselves to false courses or to decide mistakenly. Religion is to enable us to detect our hearts' Canaanites, if they present themselves to us disguised. The influences of religion are, as it were, a sort of police to

prevent us breaking bounds. Why, if the evil had been swept out of us, there would be no question of pondering and choosing and deciding between this course and that, for the whole nature of us would swing round to the Truest and the Best, as the needle to the pole. The very fact that we are content if religion thus arrests us when our steps are straying, and calls a halt to us when we are likely to go too far, shows that the moral and spiritual process in us has been left incomplete—and shows, besides, that we have not sought to make it complete. We have not got beyond the notion of *control:* to put our Canaanites to taskwork is what we have set before ourselves as the loftiest achievement of spiritual statesmanship; and with a religion which checks us just in time when check is needed, which puts a strong restraining hand on rebelliousness when the first movements of rebelliousness make themselves felt—with that we have all too often satisfied our souls.

And hence has come much of our spiritual failure. For the danger of it lies here—that moral qualities and moral impulses are living things, and, even though we are restraining the evil qualities and impulses, they may be accumulating power all the while, and may presently break out within us with a strength we shall not be able to resist. These Israelites took the risk of conspiracy and treachery on the part of the Canaanites whom they permitted to remain. How did they know that the "taskwork" might not be suddenly thrown aside, and that, instead of being obedient slaves, the Canaanites

might not unexpectedly confront them as armed and masterful foes? So for us there is no safety except in the utter casting out of all the wrong: checked to-day, the baseness may to-morrow have obtained a strength which no check will suffice to keep down; and the evil instincts and passions which we fancied we had put to deep and lasting sleep may rise up against us in their living might, all the fiercer and the more terrible for the transient spell of rest into which we forced them for a while. To content ourselves with a spiritual influence, with a religion, which simply restrains and controls the baser elements in our hearts, is as it were to bind a giant with ropes of sand. Broken soon the bonds will be, and, with the evil freed and let loose upon us in all its awful power, the soul must be overcome and dragged to ruin. So often have we failed, so often is the life polluted and the heart betrayed for us, because our religion has only sought to keep down the evil in us, and has not cleansed it away. We may be enthusiastic enough in the effort to control ourselves: there may be earnestness and sincerity enough in it; but no earnestness and no sincerity can make up for that partial and incomplete ideal of the religious life which is too often the only ideal our hearts have known. No safety lies in check and chain and prisoning of the baseness in us, though we seek to make the bondage never so stringent and severe. More sternly and thoroughly must we deal with ourselves, more sternly and thoroughly must we let our God deal with us, would we be delivered from the fear of rebellion and treachery within our gates.

Religion is not properly regarded as self-control. The highest moral ideal is not simply the attainment of some sort of balance, and rather a precarious balance at that, between the good and the bad in us —the good generally bulking just a trifle more largely and weighing just a trifle more heavily than the bad, and so inclining the scale of our lives in the direction of the good. That is about what we have hoped and striven for. A struggle between the opposing forces over us—a struggle in which the evil, we hope, will get the worst of it—further than that we have scarcely sought to go. Yet contrast that conception of the religious life with the conception of it brought before us in all the teaching of the Lord whose teaching we profess to follow, and what a pitiable thing it is! We struggle always, and we curb here and check there, and find the outbursts of the wrong set curb and check so often at defiance. *His* programme for us is rather that, with nothing left in us to curb or to check, we are to be calm, serene, and free—that, as our Father in heaven is perfect, so are we to be perfect too.

Turn for a little while to this other and truer view of religion (though I have in truth anticipated much of what needs to be said of it) which makes its function to consist, not in controlling and keeping down, but in *casting out*, the foes within our hearts. I say that is Christ's programme for us—the perfection of God Himself within us. Far away—worlds and worlds away—from our religious life and experience as the idea contained in that phrase seems to

lie, yet there is at any rate no escaping from the fact that the phrase expresses the true idea of religious life and experience; for it is the phrase which Christ Himself employed. We are to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. So are the heart's Canaanites to be driven out, till in that chosen country of God which lies within our souls no trace of their contaminating presence remains, and God can have it to Himself. The chosen things of God are to be in undisturbed possession of our hearts as their home: every evil impulse must be driven out, and driven out so far that its return is impossible for ever; and the base passions are to be, not drugged into insensibility, but slain so utterly that we can, so to say, put up into its sheath the sword which has slain them, never needing to draw it again. I know that our poor hearts might well faint with the very contemplation of such an ideal as that: I know that you and I would need to confess ourselves unspeakably far from such purity as that ideal demands; but I do say unhesitatingly that we are not answering wholeheartedly to the requirements of true religion until that is the ideal on which our hearts are set. For religion asks for conversion—and conversion is *that*. Nothing less than that is worthy of the name. Oh, it is a great idea, and must not be belittled! This is what we have set before us, and this is our call—the absolute casting forth of the wrong, the pulling up by the roots of every foul and rank growth of evil, so that it can never flourish any more. Well to watch, but the higher aim is to be so purified in the inner nature of us that the watch is needed no more. Well

to fight with ourselves and to conquer, but the loftier thing is to be transformed in the essential life of us, so that there shall be nothing left to fight, and that within us the peace of perfect holiness may reign. And though now, in our weakness, we need to keep the watch unrelaxed and have to bear the heat and weariness of the battle, let us at least remember that this is not the fulness of the better life. Strive for something more. Strive to cast out the Canaanites, that within your heart God and the things of God and the thoughts of God and the purity of God may be truly at home. *That* is conversion; and that, I say again, is our hearts' great call.

It is the unique glory of the Christian religion that it deals in such an utter moral transformation as that. There is no other religion in the world, and never has been, that comes anywhere near such a conception. Other religions, other methods, patch up the moral life and apply little peddling remedies to the heart's sinfulness and give this precept and the other precept for the observance of their devotees; but the miracle of "casting out" is beyond them—beyond their thought even, in most cases, certainly far beyond their power to perform. But Christianity deals in this—in this utter revolutionising of the inner life. It asks for it: it requires it; but it brings to bear the moral leverage which makes it possible too. Certain it is—do not our best hours bear witness?—that in the personal relationship of our souls to Christ, if we only preserved that relationship unimpaired, there is influence enough, not only to put our inward foes to taskwork, but to drive them utterly out. And that

we have not reached that serenity and quietude of spiritual experience is no proof that Christ's power cannot make us reach it; for now and again, when surrender to Him has been more nearly complete, we have felt His life baptizing us in such wise that we have been brought near to His own perfectness. And, were we always so surrendered, so always and still more entirely would He transform our inner life to the sacred purity of His own. His power can do it: it is we that have failed. And this is the crowning glory of Christianity, of Christ's work in our hearts, that they deal in, ask from us, and make possible to us did we do our part, not simply self-restraint, but the substitution for all that has been bad in us of the very goodness of God. Others may have known some method of keeping men right: Christianity has the secret and the power which leads to righteousness in the inward parts.

And thus (we may reverently say it) the greatness of the moral result in us is proportioned to the greatness of the means whereby it is accomplished. Would God waste His ministries and His love and His Christ and His Cross for less? I said others have known some method of keeping men right—surely all that wondrous sacrifice was made to do something more for us than had already been done! But to cast out from us the evil—not to subdue or restrain it, but to cast it out—to make us what God is—so to clear out of us the foulness that its very existence might also be forgotten, and it should be as though it had not been—perhaps we may reverently say that so mighty a miracle as this is

worth even Bethlehem and Gethsemane and the Cross.

To believe in this sense in "conversion," and to preach it—to that must the Christian Church come back. I know that the word has been abused: I know that a great deal of modern evangelicalism has understood very little about the conversion which has been for ever upon its lips. But do not let us, because the word has been misused, lose our belief in the thing. The Christian Church has been forgetting, I fear, what it ought to summon the hearts of men to go through: it has been simply taking the place of one among many moral educational forces; and its ministers and its members have been trying to teach goodness as the schoolmaster teaches his lessons in the schools. Secrets of self-control, methods of moral improvement, programmes of goodness—we have been dealing in these things, and forgetting to say, "These things are not enough. When they are all done, Christ wants so to work upon you that from base to summit of your natures you shall be re-created and formed anew." And I say that this message must the Christian Church proclaim with louder voice, would the Christian Church fulfil her rightful part.

But for our own hearts, first of all, must we seek that transforming power. To begin the casting out of the Canaanites, at least, let us set ourselves, lest our Master, looking upon the hearts which should be entirely His own, should see, in spite of outward quietude and restraint, the alien presences lurking there. Let there be an end of the correcting and the

improving and the controlling—at any rate let there be an end of being satisfied with that; and let us be renewed, re-made, through all the ranges of our being. Christ, if we would fall back on Him and into Him with full surrender, would make us begin afresh, with all that we were wiped away. Not control of the old life, but the giving of a life that is new, is what He will do and what He wants to do for us. And only then—when we have been converted and become as little children, living out the good spontaneously because of the goodness He has implanted within us—only then shall we be worthy to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

II

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE SECRET

"And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ."—JOHN xvii. 3.

WE may take these few words as a revelation of Christ's inmost consciousness: they contain His own account, His own condensed and epitomised account, of His mission and His gospel. Christ appears to rise to His height here, just because the awful end was near: almost at the foot of the cross, He speaks of eternal life and of Himself as the Giver of it. He seems to put His whole secret into one brief sentence. It is simple, yet daring in its simplicity. Men are going to murder Him, and still He knows that He has so impressed Himself upon the world and will so impress Himself upon the world, that through Him, through knowing Him, men and women may to all time escape out of their imprisonments and limitations into eternal life. He seems to survey the world, to look as if for the last time on the struggling, tired crowds, and to bethink Himself, "What they want is to know God—they would be lifted out of

their struggle and weariness into eternal life then." And then there comes the further consciousness that to know Him, the Christ, is to know God, and that so by knowing Him eternal life is won. Men were soon to slay Him, but still He knew that He was the One "whom Thou didst send." Though so near His dying, He yet makes for Himself the stupendous claim that to know Him is everything, to know Him is to know God, to know Him is eternal life.

The one secret of blessedness, then, according to Christ's own account of it, is to know Christ. All else is included in that. The discovery of Christianity, if one may put it so, is that the secret of all life lies, not in *doing* anything, not even primarily in *being* anything, but in establishing a relationship between ourselves and One who has done everything needful and who is everything needful. There are struggles in our life: what we are to do is not first of all to try for victory in the struggle, but to know Christ. Then we shall be lifted out of the struggle, for it is eternal life to know Him. There are mysteries hanging about this life and the next: what we are to do is not first of all to try and solve the mysteries, but to know Christ. Then the mysteries will, so to say, solve themselves, for it is eternal life to know Him. There is sin in our own hearts spoiling our life: what we are to do is not first of all to engage in a useless attempt to crush the sin, but to know Christ. Then we shall be taken out of the range of the sin, for it is eternal life to know Him. He gathers up in Himself all the secrets, and we have only to relate ourselves

to Him. What lies at the beginning of true life is not "finding salvation," in the sense in which we sometimes use the phrase, not even finding Christ, but simply recognising, "knowing," the Christ who has found us. We have more or less discarded the old formularies about Christ having done all for us and about there being nothing left for us to do. Yet they had great truth in them. Perhaps they were rightly discarded: perhaps they had come to be interpreted in mistaken ways and had been robbed by continual use of their true significance: yet, I say again, they had great truth in them. For the one outstanding, distinctive idea of the religion of Christ—the idea which imparts to it its undying inspiration and its inexhaustible power, and makes it the support which does not break beneath us in our living or our dying—is this, that all we have to do is to establish ourselves in a right relation to Him who has done everything, that the answer to every riddle and the satisfying of every need and the correction of every imperfection is gathered up in the One Personality, and that we have nothing to do but to connect ourselves with Him. Simply to *know* Him is everything, even eternal life.

It is the elementary fact which underlies, or ought to underlie, all our living of the Christian life, that all things are given to us, all our problems solved, all our difficulties surmounted, this world set beneath our feet and the other world assured to us, as we relate ourselves to Christ, as we "know" Him. I say that this is the one outstanding, distinctive idea of the religion of Christ. For all other struggles Christ

substitutes the struggle to know Him, and says to man, "Carry *that* struggle through, and all your other struggles settle themselves." Yet we do not always understand that; and much of the difficulty that still clings around our Christian discipleship, much of our failure in it, comes from not understanding that. We begin by trying to reach out after a high life as after something to be attained by strife and labour. We want goodness, and we try to school ourselves into it: we want rest of spirit and calm of heart, and we try to force ourselves by self-discipline and continual watch into calm and rest: we want, we know, the touch of eternal life upon our souls, and we seek feverishly and with pain to raise ourselves toward it. And we find that we cannot do it. We are far from goodness still. Rest and calm are still not ours. And as we confess our failure, we turn to Christ thinking that surely He will give us help in our efforts to reach the better and more peaceful life we long for so much. Our strength is not enough for it; but He will make our strength greater. That is what at first we take Christ's blessing to mankind to be; and some of us have not got beyond that conception of it yet. He will supplement our power: He will make us strong where we were weak; and the effort that was vain will be crowned with triumph as we look to Him. The struggle is still upon us, we think: it is still our part to win the goodness and the peace; but He is with us to hearten and to strengthen us now, while we stood alone before. But we are forced to a further step soon. We fail and fail again, even though we have sought for the

help of the strong One: the bitterness of our struggle is not past, even though His presence be near. And so we cast ourselves down before Him at last, and say, "I cannot win the holiness and the restful heart I want. Thou hast them, and must give them to me as I call." And we stretch the hand toward Him, since salvation and rest and all good gifts are in His keeping, and look for Him to give them into ours. Yet even that is not the inmost secret of Christianity. "This is life eternal, that they should *know* Thee the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." To know Him —to *know* Him. Not to be strengthened by Him in the effort to win eternal life, but to know Him, and to find that eternal life is ours in the very act of knowing Him. Not to have Him offer to us the gift of eternal life from outside, as it were, but to know Him, and to find that eternal life is ours in the very act of knowing Him. We want so many things, but we shall never win them. Instead of trying to win them, try only to know Christ; and we shall win them all, so. We need to call in our energies from the many pursuits on which we have sent them forth: we need to concentrate them then on the one pursuit, the one aim, of relating ourselves rightly to the Christ —the pursuit, the aim, of "knowing" Him; and as we know Him, all that we had in vain sought to win is ours. This is Christianity, its supreme distinction, its glorious redeeming truth. The Christ comes to the struggling world, to men torn with desires for a nobler life they cannot reach, racked and rent with aspirations they cannot satisfy, and says to them, "I

gather up in Myself all the secrets for which your hearts yearn. For all the desires that burn unfulfilled within you, possess the one desire to know Me, and, as you know Me, all other desires are answered. For all the aspirations that torture you, possess the one aspiration to know Me, and, as you know Me, every other aspiration is satisfied." Other leaders have spoken words of wisdom to men in their efforts to rise higher, and have spoken them truly and well; but Christ does more than speak the words or give the power to help us rise: He is Himself the touch of the highest life upon the low. Other religions have supplied inspiration in the struggle for a better life, and have done it nobly; but Christ does more than supply inspiration: He is Himself the Life and Light of men. All the secrets are His: the blessings long and vainly sought for are gathered up in Him; and to *know* Him is all that is left for us to do. In the right relationship between us and Him, in the contact of His personality with ours, is the secret of every blessing, of eternal life. We have but to know Him.

And knowing Christ is what? Just at present the claim is insistently made that modern theology has rediscovered Christ, as it is sometimes put—very absurdly put, as I think—and that we know Him now as He has not been known for long. We are told, what is no doubt true, that by laying too great stress on creed the Church has lost touch of the Christ behind the creed. We are told, what is no doubt partly true—but only partly—that by carrying

ourselves back in thought to the Christ as He lived and walked among men, we get to know Him far, far better than if we come into contact with Him only through what Churches have said about Him and systems they have formulated about Him. The watchword of the newer thought—the watchword so persistently repeated that it will soon come to have as much cant and unreality about it as the repetition of a creed could ever have—is "Back to Christ." But we may adopt that watchword, and yet not really know Christ. What the newer thought has done and is doing for us, and what we may all rejoice in, is this—it brings clearly before us the conditions under which Christ lived, makes His human life real to us, sets that life before us in all its grand and yet simple beauty, helps us to appreciate it, to picture it to ourselves, as it has not been appreciated and pictured before. We seem to hear Him speak, to be with Him as He went to and fro and ministered and healed, to perceive His wonderful sweetness and His radiant grace. That is all clear gain. But valuable as it all is, it is not really knowing Christ. When all is said, it is little else than an exercise of the historical imagination, and that will never, never redeem a soul. Can you fancy the text reading, "This is life eternal, that they should possess a vivid historical imagination, and be able to bring clearly before them the picture of the earthly life of their Lord"? We may listen to lectures about the geography and customs of Palestine till we know precisely the conditions amid which Christ's human life was lived—we may criticise this reported saying of Christ's, and cut out

here and amend there, till we know precisely whether He said this particular thing once or whether He said it twice, and that this other thing, which we have always supposed Him to have said, He never said at all—and we may not know Christ, with any knowing that has eternal life in it, when the whole business is done. What He was and said and did we may know, yet not know *Him.*

Then what is it to know Him? Is it to trust Him? Not simply that, if you trust only in something He did long ago. Is it to love Him? Not simply that, if you love Him only as He stands far back in the past, for the redemption He achieved then. What is it to know Him? It is to have Him pressing Himself, with all the power that ever was in Him, *still* in Him, upon our hearts to-day. It is to be conscious that He is for ever taking *my* life afresh and impressing Himself upon it afresh. It is to hear Him calling to me, not down the centuries from long ago, but from here—close at my side, with a voice that is newly lifted to-day, an invitation that is newly given to-day. It is not to be inspired by what He was, but to feel His power now coming straight from the living heart of Him to me. It is to experience, not the reflex influence of what He did far back in the history of mankind, but the direct influence of what He does. It is to discern, amid the figures which crowd the canvas of our life, that One Figure moving ceaselessly to and fro. The Real Presence, if you like. To know Christ in this sense—that every moment He comes with a new ministry to snatch me out of my littleness into His greatness—that is

eternal life. To know Christ in this sense—that He gives the secret of life newly to me ever and ever again—that is eternal life. To know Christ in this sense—that He repeats to-day every blessing He bestowed in other days, changing the form of it to meet the changing need, answering to every hour's requirement with grace newly-born out of His great and loving heart—to know Him so is to take life from Him now, is eternal life. Not the historical imagination which reconstructs the life He lived, but the quick, living insight which discerns and makes the soul surrender to the life He lives—that is the knowing Him which sends the flood-tides of eternal life upon us. Know Him as He presents Himself livingly to us now. So does He take us and identify our living with His—makes our life great and eternal as His own.

And it is belief in this possibility of a direct communication of life to us, not from a Christ of so many hundred years ago, but from a Christ strong as ever to-day—it is this belief which distinguishes the ever-powerful and ever-living Christianity from the many other Christianities so invitingly held up for the acceptance of mankind. That Christ did something and said something which has been and will be an undying inspiration to the world, all are ready to acknowledge. But *that* does not make Christianity. If Christ only did that, and is not doing more than that still, then He is not now the Giver of life to the world. He spake great and noble words, they all confess. But *that* does not make Christianity. If He speaks no more—if He has

uttered no other word since that last cry on the cross—if the listening soul cannot catch His accents now—oh, the utter loneliness and desolation! Oh, the empty, empty world! We do not know Him as the Giver of eternal life unless through all the veils that hide Him from our mortal vision He yet reaches out the hand to touch us, unless He grasps us so closely, holds us so near to His heart, beating with the life that is eternal, that He makes His eternal life to be ours.

It is only a mystic's dream, is it? Nay, verily, it is the everlasting secret which redeems the world. When we no more strain and strain our look backward so much to catch the figure of the Christ as He was, but have our eyes opened to see Him as He is—when we no longer whittle down His great promise, "Lo, I am with you alway," and make it mean something about His influence, His inspiration, remaining with us, but take it to mean just exactly what it says—then shall we understand the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. And then shall we realise how wondrously true it is that He gives unto His own eternal life, and that none can pluck them out of His hand.

And it is *eternal* life that becomes ours when we thus know Him. Because He is Himself so great, He so greatens life for us, when He lives in us—and greatens it not in one direction or on one side only, but in all directions and on all sides—that it can be called by no other name than eternal life. I suppose I need not say that it means something more than an

endless, an immortal life. It means life eternal, not simply in the duration, but in the quality of it. Knowing Christ makes us live as God lives, so far as that can be for us. Knowing Christ makes us live as God lives—that is the miracle—sets us into worlds where limitations and sorrows and dyings cease to have any meaning. Know Christ, and the wearinesses and weaknesses by which an unceasing cry is wrung out from the world cannot touch your true life to harm it any more than they can touch God's; for Christ gives you eternal life. Know Christ, and you cannot die any more than God can die; for Christ gives you eternal life. There is nothing partial about the blessing Christ bestows. Eternal life is a thing others dare not speak of; but He gives that because He Himself possesses it, and, in giving that, gives all. One may look on this trial of humanity and another may look on that; one voice may speak a word to make this struggle lighter, and another may possess some secret to strengthen the soul in that conflict—Christ, when we know Him, does not patch and mend life so, but just lifts us away out of all these things into the eternal worlds, so that trial and struggle and conflict are to us no more than they are to Himself, to God. One has the secret that will make life worthier, he thinks; and another speaks the word to make life happier, he thinks: Christ bids us just know Him, and all is done. We want to enlarge our whole conception of what Christ is to us and of what He does for us. He is not simply the soul's Physician who, far better than others, understands the soul's disease and, far more successfully than others, applies

the cure: He is the Giver of an eternal life which is for ever out of the reach of any ill. He is not One who comes after a long succession of helpers and inspirers, and who does more completely what they did in part, carries their methods to ends and issues that were beyond their reach: He is the Giver of eternal life, the One who makes man like to God. When we know Christ in the sense of identifying our inmost life with His, so that it is He, not we, that live, then the sins and the disabilities and the death that were so much to us are nothing; for what are these things to Him? The eternal life that is in Him fears no touch of sin, and can be hindered by no disability, and cannot die; and that eternal life is ours. He makes us live His life, which is the eternal life of the eternal God.

That is the gift He gives, though a gift we have perhaps not taken yet as we might have taken it. That is what Christ does for us. He breathes through us, when we really know Him, the eternal life which has God's richness, God's immortality. We, very ordinary men and women, with just commonplace lives to live, as it seems to us, may live God's life if we know Christ. Any life may become "eternal" by "knowing" the eternal One who is near it. What! mine, so cramped, so very narrow, so utterly lacking in anything heroic or great? Yes, if you know Christ.

"The lives which seem so poor, so low,
The hearts which are so cramped and dull,
The baffled hopes, the impulse slow,
Thou takest, touchest all, and lo!
They blossom to the beautiful."

What Christ will do for you and me is no mere alleviation of life's pain, no mere strengthening of life's weakness, no mere lightening of the sadness at life's close, but to give a life to which all these things shall be as though they had not been. Eternal life! If we could only rise to some apprehension of it! Eternal life! That is His call to us, His promise to us—a call and promise that open out before us vast, inexhaustible possibilities of life and being, which summon us to be one with God.

And I say again, we have but to know Him. To some it was said long ago, "In the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not." So it may be that there stands the One among us now whom we have not really known, though we may have known much about Him. Yet if we did know Him, really know Him, it would be eternal life. Only the flash of recognition, the utter surrender, the loss of self in Him; and in our new fulness of life it shall be to us as though there were new heavens and a new earth wherein all things speak of eternity and of God, and as though the former things, dimly remembered as a dream that did vex and fret us once—as though the former things had passed away.

III

PAUL'S METHOD OF GOODNESS

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead."—PHILIPPIANS iii. 10, 11.

OUT of the many great questions which the world has to face and answer, greatest of all is the question, How may goodness be attained by struggling human souls? That this is really the most momentous practical problem with which our minds can grapple, we cannot for an instant doubt, when we pass from reckoning the importance of things by their immediate and transitory advantages to the truer method of reckoning the importance of things according to their absolute and permanent worth. Important it doubtless is to ask, in regard to society, how the greatest good of the greatest number may be secured: time and thought spent on social problems can never be wasted; and yet it is at least possible to give to the consideration of social problems some of the energy which might be more usefully employed in striving to make the individual members of society, not

happier or more comfortable, but better. I am not sure that this is not the mistake made on many hands to-day. For ourselves, too, there are insistent questions to be met as to what use our life may most profitably be put to, and what purpose our strength may best be made to serve : long and anxious thought may have to press upon us before a satisfactory reply is found; and it is possible to build up whole philosophies of life round about such inquiries as these. It has often happened that men have taken these as the first and last questions that concern them, and, having answered them to their own content, have fancied that they have found all the needed secrets for their true and worthy living. Yet, if it be from a God of goodness that our life came, if it be as children of a God of goodness that we are here, if there be Goodness throned in heaven and if Goodness rule our world, then every other question fades into insignificance beside this, How by us, may goodness be won? When we get down to the depths of things, to the reality beneath all deceptive appearances, to the heart of life, there is no problem that can for a moment be compared with that.

And as the question, How may goodness be attained? is first and foremost in order of importance so perhaps has it been met by more answers than any other question ever asked. Prophets have prophesied, oracles have spoken, seers have dreamt, concerning the path over which men, though on weary feet, might find quickest access to those far heights where the white lights of holiness should

lie on them for ever. Leaders of men have sent their followers to painful labours of sacrifice and to long vigils of prayer, that so the foulness should be scourged out of them and purity come in. Yet many who have set out to climb the steep ascent to holiness have come back with downcast look and bleeding feet and hearts from which the shock of failure has driven all hope away. The ascent has been *too* steep. Sacrifice and prayer have often and often left the soul scarce purer than it was before; and, though these things may help to goodness, not *all* the secret is there. Still one asks, How may goodness be won?

This is Paul's answer to the question. Through knowing Christ, and the fellowship of His sufferings, and the power of His resurrection, he reaches to the righteousness "which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." And to unfold something of the apostle's rich thought may help us the more assuredly to answer the great question for ourselves.

What, then, is Paul's method of goodness? It is, in brief, this—that he cannot win or hold goodness, but that goodness, in Christ, is to win and hold him. He is not strong enough to keep his grip upon righteousness; but he will submit himself so entirely to Christ and to the righteousness which is in Christ, that Christ and Christ's righteousness will keep a strong grip upon him. He wants to know Christ so well, to be united with Christ so intimately, that he may catch from Christ the holiness which for himself

he cannot attain. He cannot win or hold goodness; but goodness, in Christ, is to win and hold him.

And as that was Paul's method of goodness, so is it the method of goodness that must be adopted by Christian disciples to all time.

But Paul had previously been trying other methods of attaining to that which was good: he had been zealous about it more than most; and it was not until he had proved for himself how in other methods there lay only failure, that he came to the method which led him, or which was going to lead him, to success. He had gone the round of Jewish ritual and had fulfilled every requirement of the Jewish law: as to *these* things, at all events, even down to the minutest punctilios of ceremonial, he had nothing wherewith to reproach himself; and whatever moral benefit there was to be obtained out of a careful observance of the moral programme prescribed in the Jewish faith, ought most assuredly to have been his. Yet, after he had kept it throughout, it had done for him nothing at all.

So there are methods of goodness whereon we waste our strength—and that even after we have recognised and confessed that the secret of all our spiritual success is in Christ. As to how Christ and discipleship to Christ is to bring about our moral and spiritual perfecting, we have very often only a confused and clouded thought. That Christ came and lived, that He comes to us and lives now, in order to help us toward goodness, of course we know; but in what way His inspiration toward goodness is to

seize and influence our hearts, we have often hardly begun to understand.

Sometimes we try the method of self-control. Did not Christ come to enable us, by His presence and His spirit within us, to hold ourselves constantly in check, to keep more untiring watch, to set under more rigid restraint the passions that are so apt to leap to life in us and make us captive to their power? Is not that Christ's ministry? Is not that how He helps us toward goodness? Self-control indeed there must be. Yet in self-control, were it never so perfect and enduring, there would be no real inspiration to spiritual progress for us: we might by means of it keep ourselves away from the bad, but could not make our way toward what is best; and though by a careful and rigid guardianship of our own natures we may prevent ourselves from getting worse than we are, that negative sort of goodness is surely not all that Christ's followers are to strive after and to attain. More than that must He intend to do for us. Then shall it be self-sacrifice? Is the method and secret of goodness to be discovered in that? Does our Master demand self-sacrifice from us, and make self-sacrifice possible for us, and impose *that* on our hearts as the one condition of reaching to that which is good? Self-sacrifice indeed there must be. But in merely emptying our natures there can be no real, no positive virtue: give up this and surrender that, and, although your heart may have bled as from a hundred wounds with the pain of the surrender and the giving up, the soul will not rise into the calm

serenities of holiness by that rough and wearying way. More must Christ intend to do for us than enable us to bear the wrench of sacrifice and the pain of denying self. His secret of goodness must be greater and deeper far than that.

And this is it, as Paul interprets it for us: "That I may gain Christ, and be found in him"—"that I may know him"—that is it. "I change the whole direction of my striving now. I do not spend myself on that rending, feverish quest after what is good any more. I get so close to the Christ that I may be, as it were, found *in* Him. I get so close to the Christ that my life forgets itself in Him, and, because He is goodness, my life becomes good. I get so close to the Christ that my heart throbs, beat by beat, in unison with His, and, because He is goodness, my heart grows pure. I get so close to the Christ that my will dies away in His, and, because He is goodness, I will the right. I get so close to the Christ that, instead of vainly trying to clasp the longed-for holiness with arms that tremble and drop powerless so soon, I find the holiness in Him has thrown a firm and close embrace round me. I am found in Him. It is no more I that seek and find goodness, but goodness—and goodness is Christ—that seeks and finds me."

That is the moral secret of Christianity, for us as it was for Paul, be sure of it, whether we have ever realised it or no. What distinguishes the life of goodness according to Christ from all schemes of moral reform is just this—the Christian disciple has not to *win* goodness, but only to *surrender to* it.

Christ does not want just to make our hearts a little purer and our wills a little stronger and our lives a little more fair. He wants to grip His disciples with so absolute a grip, that there shall no longer be any question of patching up the imperfection of their imperfect lives, but that His own perfect life shall be theirs. What we are to set before ourselves is not to make ourselves good, not even to have Christ make us good, but to subject our whole nature so utterly to the nature of Christ that all we think and say and do may have its source, not in us, but in Him. The Christian ideal is not that the disciple is to toil, weary step after weary step, over a road which leads to goodness, having a Christ of love and power at his side to hold him up when the faltering feet refuse to go further and to cheer his heart when despair steals in. But the Christian ideal is that the disciple is just to turn—to turn, as it were, away from himself and his weaknesses—to find goodness close to him in Christ, and to fall into its arms. My thoughts impure —then I will let Christ have such power over me that He will think within my mind. My heart loves so many wrong things—then I will let Christ have such power over me that His desires will take possession of my heart. To know Him—to be found in Him—to lay aside the winning of goodness, and to call to Him, "Come and live in me, Thou who art Thyself Goodness"—to yield up soul and spirit, so that in the closeness of the bond between us we may catch our life from Him—that is the way in which the Christ will make His children good.

"Then the attaining of goodness is after all an easy

thing," are you inclined to say? "Not the long and anxious struggle we thought it was, not the tiring task for which all the energies of our nature could hardly prove enough: nothing but the giving up our nature to the dominance of Christ's nature—the ceasing from all our struggle and letting Him take hold upon us—nothing but that! An easy thing, after all." Nay but surely as difficult a thing as we can be called upon to do. Nothing but that, indeed; but that is a great deal. It is just against this Christian method of goodness that so many instincts in us will rebel. Tell us that we are to *do* something, and right gladly would we set about the doing of it. Show us the long courses of toil at the end of which, if we are faithful, goodness will be found, and we would not care how long and hard soever they might be. Still, it would be *our* power that was being bent upon the task: it would still be on *us* that the achievement rested; and goodness, when at last it was attained, would be a prize which *our* strength had won. But because Christ says to His own, "Put aside your doings, and devote yourself to fixing your heart and mind and will down into My heart and mind and will—make your life to lie submissive and acquiescent upon Mine"—because He asks *that* of us, does our rebellious nature find the Christian method of goodness hard. We want to do and fight and strive for goodness: we will bear it all if only at the end we can say, "I have fought and won and laid my hand upon the prize." But it is hard to do nothing, to school ourselves into letting Christ take possession of us and do all. An easy thing! Nay, but a hard

thing in very truth. Self-control we shall need still: self-sacrifice we shall need still; but they are, as it were, only the soul's preliminary steps with which it starts out upon its way. Control ourselves we must, because our natural impulse is to tear ourselves away from the absolute dominion of the Christ who is goodness; sacrifice ourselves we must, because so many things have made their abiding home within us which hinder the absolute dominion of the Christ who is goodness; but when we have controlled and sacrificed ourselves, we have only just begun. For ever will there rest upon us the task—and it is a task which all the world seems to make almost impossible to us—the task of keeping our nature, our life, firm, fixed, fastened, to and into the nature and the life of the Christ. Not an easy thing, but a hard thing, to our fretful and feverish souls, is that. As the apostle said, so must we say, even after Christ's secret of goodness has been learnt, "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus."

But, however hard it be, that is the secret. "That I may know him." Not to win goodness but to get so close to Christ that He, who is Himself Goodness, may transfuse His life through mine.

And how does Paul find that closeness to Christ, union with Christ, enables him to solve the problem of goodness? How does Christ's grip upon him make him good?

He goes first to Christ's cross, and there the self-

sacrificing Christ takes hold upon him and enables him to sacrifice himself. Then he goes to Christ in His resurrection, and the risen Christ takes hold upon him and enables him to live His own high and glorious life.

He goes first to Christ's cross. He seeks to know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, to become conformed to Christ's death. Would we have Christ's spirit take hold upon our spirits, Christ's soul absorb our souls into itself, as it were, in such wise that Christ's goodness may be made ours, we too must go first to Christ's cross, know the fellowship of His sufferings, become conformed to His death. For, as we stand in spirit close to the cross on which He died, we realise the utter hostility that exists between the world's ideals of life and the best ideals of life. In Him the best ideals were gathered up: He brought them into and realised them in a world devoted to other ideals than His; and His life-ideals brought Him to *this*—to the Cross. And the world's baser ideals possess us in part: not free from their presence and their power can we declare our hearts to be; and the wrench of surrendering those baser ideals, the pain of sacrificing them, must our hearts know, would we share the holiness of our Lord. And from His cross, when we go to Him there, Christ takes such hold upon us that the wrench can be gladly suffered, and the sacrifice unmurmuringly borne. "Thou didst bear this, and lose so much—then I will bear with utter willingness whatever there is to bear, and lose without repining whatever must be lost, that I may share the goodness which drove

Thee to Calvary." Our sacrifices for the sake of goodness grow lighter to us as we look upon His: He takes hold upon us and carries us through our sacrifice with Him. Would we possess Christ's spirit of holiness, we must go first to the Cross and seek to know the fellowship of His sufferings. At His cross He will grip us so powerfully that the first step in the attainment of holiness—the sacrificing of that which is contrary to holiness—will be past.

We have sought sometimes to live the life of holiness without a cross in it. We have known nothing of the fellowship of Christ's sufferings: we have not been conformed unto His death. We have not let Christ grip us first from His cross. Yet His holiness, His goodness, will never, never be ours, till we betake ourselves there, and say to Him in utter surrender, "Let Thy spirit of sacrifice take hold of my spirit, and make it to be a spirit of sacrifice too. As for holiness Thou didst become submissive unto death, even the death of the cross, so for holiness may I become submissive to whatever loss and pain the pursuit of holiness may bring." Something must be sacrificed if Christ's goodness is to hold us; and the spirit of sacrifice comes to us at the cross. Christ's own spirit enters into us there, and itself bears the sacrifice which, without His cross, we could not face.

And from Christ at His cross, Paul passes to Christ in His resurrection, that as the self-sacrificing Christ has taken hold upon him and enabled him to sacrifice himself, so the risen and newly-living Christ may take

hold upon him and enable him to experience the power and the thrill of a new life.

What is it to know the power of Christ's resurrection? When He arose from the dead, He was henceforth free from all the conflict, separated from all the struggle: the sacrifice was over, the victory won; and as the world had done its worst with Him, He had done with the world. When He arose, His home was in Heaven. And as we submit our spirits to the spirit of the risen and living Christ, He bears us away with Himself to the heaven of holiness and purities which is His home, consecrates us with Himself to all that is good, and holds us fast to it by His might. When we realise our Lord's living power and lose our natures in it, He Himself lives out the ideals of holiness within us. If only we could so realise His living power, and so lose ourselves in it, that His life might enfold ours utterly, and every movement of our life might be but the manifestation of His life through us, the purest and the best would be revealed in us. He Himself would reveal it in us, were we abandoned to Him. Union with the risen and living Christ brings us into goodness, because it brings the Christ, who lives in goodness, into us.

I know how remote these deeper experiences of which the apostle speaks must seem to most of us. Yet I wish that now, at least, they might touch our hearts. "The fellowship of his sufferings"—"the power of his resurrection"—"becoming conformed unto his death"—we read the phrases and repeat them, with some vague idea that they are phrases to

which there is scarcely any reality to correspond, phrases which the apostle employed in some more or less poetic fashion, under the stress of his Christian enthusiasm and his noble zeal. Yet, would we enter into holiness, no way of entering into it can we ever find except Paul's chosen way. Into holiness we shall never enter, unless we resolve to have no more a holiness of our own, but the holiness which is through faith in Christ. And the holiness which is through faith in Christ comes to us only as we let Christ, from His cross, in His risen life, take hold upon us, grip us, live in us, overflow our nature with His. Would we be delivered from the long struggle with ourselves and against ourselves—know something of the serenity of a life which is growing to be at home with goodness, and which is being slowly, perhaps, but surely, cut off from all that is not good? Then this is the secret our hearts must learn. To go to the Christ who died, that the spirit of sacrifice which brought Him to His death may pass from Him to us, take the place of our self-seeking spirit, and enable us to sacrifice ourselves too. To go to the Christ who lives, that the high and pure ideals which are realised in Him may become realised in us, through His utter possession of our souls.

The secret of goodness is the magnetism of the Christ—the Christ drawing us into Himself, till we draw goodness from Him. All that we have to set our striving upon, is that we may be found in Him. We cannot win or hold goodness; but Christ, who is Goodness, is to win and hold us.

IV

WITNESS, LEADER, COMMANDER

"Behold, I have given him for a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples."—ISAIAH lv. 4.

WHETHER these words were originally spoken of Christ or not, they may at any rate be legitimately applied to Him in our thought. Whatever may have been the immediate meaning and intention of them, it is of Christ that they are pre-eminently true. He appears before all peoples as witness to clearest truth, and as leader who inspires most unfaltering confidence, and as commander to whose authority obedience must be most unquestioning and quick. The prophet speaks to his nation of some one who is to come to satisfy the nation's need, who would bring to the people water which would quench their thirst, wine and milk without money and without price; and whether or no his insight was keen enough and his foresight far-reaching enough to discern how perfectly his prophecy was to be fulfilled in the Christ whom the future years would bring, we, looking back upon the Christ from the standpoint of our later time, can see that the prophecy's entire fulfilment has been

in Him. Partially, perhaps, it may have been fulfilled in others whom Israel knew: others there may have been who gave to the people satisfaction and rest in a measure, and who in their degree were witnesses and leaders and commanders to them; but of the Christ we have to confess that none who went before and none who came after have been and done these things in so great a degree as He. As we think of Him and look upon Him, the message appears as it were to be written by God's own hand in letters of light round about Him, "Behold, I have given him for a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples."

And these three titles indicate in a manner the way in which Christ progressively reveals Himself to men. He is first witness, bearing testimony to certain spiritual realities: then, when we have heard and received the witness, He comes to us as the leader who will guide us in the way by which we may reach those spiritual realities; and then, when by His loving guidance of us He has awakened and confirmed within us a trust and confidence in Him, He appears as commander who, because He has thus helped us and proved His faithfulness, has rightful claim to our obedient service.

Christ is witness and leader and commander to mankind.

Christ is given to us as witness. He is witness to the world of great spiritual facts which might, without His witness to them, remain unknown or become crowded out and forgotten. He speaks to men of

God, of their relation to God, of the higher and nobler issues of life, of goodness, of an eternal Fatherhood and an everlasting love, of conscience, of immortality. And He bears witness of these things (let us understand this) not so much by what He says as by what He is. Christ spoke of these things, and never man spake as this man spake; but His witness to these sacred and eternal things is greater than any words even of His could be. It is by what He is that He bears His testimony: it was the wonder of His personality that preached to men and women in those earthly years with a message they could not repudiate or argue away: it is still the wonder of His personality, as we seek in our thought and meditation to reconstruct the lines of it and to make it vivid to our apprehension, that makes divine facts most real to us and compels our faith in them to-day. It is one of the most wondrous powers in Christ that, as we look upon Him, we *know* that there is a God not far from us who cares for us and to whom we belong—we *know* that our life consists not in the abundance of the things we possess, but looks also in other directions and has other and nobler ends—we *know* that right and truth and duty are the all-important things to live for, the aims and objects that make nothing of all other aims and objects—we *know* that death is nothing but just one short step, as God takes our hand and bids us come, from the sand which shifts beneath our feet over a firmer foothold on the eternal rock. I say we *know* all these things as we look on Christ: by what He is He is witness to them; and so long as He is there, we could not believe any-

thing else. The higher world is in Him, and God looks forth on us through Him, and immortality comes down to touch our mortal life by Him—and by His wondrous personality He is witness to the peoples for ever of all these things! How all materialisms, and all views of life that leave God out of account, and all belittlings of human destiny, and all denials of the spiritual and eternal—how all these things grow powerless to shake the deep calmness of our faith, if we do but look on the Christ who is witness! We may doubt sometimes whether we are not befooling ourselves when we name by the name of Father a distant God whom we have not seen and cannot see; but one glance upon the Christ, and we brush the doubt aside, for He is the witness who carries certainty by what He is! We may sometimes, gazing forward at the unknown future, for a moment see some cloud upon the prospect, and question with fear whether we shall ever come to the city which hath foundations, or ever behold any heaven with opened gates for us to enter in; but one glance upon the Christ, and the cloud is lost in new outflashing of sunshine, for He is the witness who carries certainty by what He is! Always the wonder of His personality, the wonder of what He is, the wonder of *Himself*, makes doubt impossible and scatters our uncertainties, and brings back the God and the heaven which in some failing moment we may have seemed to lose.

Our great need, the great need of the whole world, is so to behold Christ as to apprehend this witness of His. He speaks for Himself as no other can speak for Him. Perhaps it may be that sometimes Christ

is so much talked about, and what He does for us is so much talked about, that we lose the vision of the Christ Himself in the many words about Him. Yet all our speaking about the Christ should lead at last to the quiet contemplation of Him in which the full power of His witness may make itself felt, and in which His presence silently confirms our faith in all sacred things. Here and now, at any rate, let it be ours to take the Christ first of all as witness, to try and make our sight of Him so clear, our contemplation of Him so undisturbed, that through Him—through what He is—the facts of the spiritual world and of our relation to the spiritual world and to God, may re-assert themselves for us to the strengthening of our faith.

One of the best men our Congregational ministry ever possessed (although he died almost unknown except to his own particular circle)[1]—and I might add, one of the most intellectual men too, one who in no wise undervalued intellect or its exercise or its results—tells us in the preface to his book that at one time he passed into a period of anxiety and doubt, during which he began to fear that his old faiths were lost to him for ever. But he was induced, he goes on to say—he was induced, he knew not how, to read the Gospels over again, to come to them as it were to a new book, and to let the influence of the story they told play upon him as it would. And as by the reading of the Gospels the Christ came to stand clearly

[1] The reference is to the Rev. J. Ogmore Davies, of Blackburn, who died in 1892. The book is entitled "Sunrise on the Soul, or the Path for the Perplexed."

before him once more, the time of stress and difficulty and doubt passed, and the earlier joyful faith returned. And so it will ever be. Let the voices of unbelief be numerous and loud and persistent as they may, let "the spirit that denies" pervade the whole atmosphere around us as it may, yet so long as in some way—by the reading of the old story of what Christ was, or by the study of the ever new story of what Christ is—so long as in some way we can draw the picture of Him for ourselves in the innermost recesses of the mind, our grip on the things that are unseen and eternal (all the more true because they are unseen) will not be loosened. Behold, He is given for a witness to the peoples! Doubts and questionings and denials cannot live where He is; and we laugh at our want of faith as the vision of the Christ grows upon us.

Our acceptance of the testimony Christ bears lies at the foundation of discipleship. He will never be leader, for we shall not trust Him—He will never be commander, for we shall lack the impulses to obey Him—unless He is first witness. He speaks to us of God, of our relation to God, of the higher and nobler issues of life, of goodness, of an eternal Fatherhood and an everlasting love, of conscience, of immortality.

Christ is witness.

Then, after witness, Christ is given as leader. As witness He speaks of the eternal and spiritual facts: as leader He imparts the inspiration which enables us to realise and be true to them. As we see the Christ before us, there emerge into view lofty conceptions of human life and destiny, great significances

which our existence may come to have, high and worthy thoughts of what we can and ought to be. But not only so. As we see the Christ before us, there rushes upon us too the spirit of power to turn all these things into practical realities: we not only behold them afar off and hope for them and long for them, but we rise up with the determination that they must be attained and the consciousness that under His inspiration we can attain them: He not only bears testimony to these great spiritual thoughts and ideals, but He leads us into them. Together with the revelation of great hopes for man and great facts which concern man, comes also the consciousness that the revelation of the great hopes and the great facts is an intensely practical matter, and not a vague and shadowy dream. The Christ who brings the hitherto distant and unknown worlds into our view sets Himself before us as the guide to take us there. Witness is He, but leader too.

Many have been witnesses in their degree, but as it were witnesses of far-off dreams which they could not assist man to realise. The witness-bearing and the leadership do not always or often go together. Poets have sung and seers have prophesied of many a paradise whereinto humanity might enter and find rest: many and glorious have been the dreams men have dreamt about the perfecting and redeeming of themselves and of their fellow-men; but there has lacked the mysterious something in poem and prophecy and dream which like an electric flash might pass into the soul and make men feel, "That thing can be done and that vision can be realised,

and *I* can do it and realise it." And the bearing of such witness only leaves men the more downcast and despairing: to paint for them the glories of a life which can never be theirs and of a destiny they can never attain is but a doubtful blessing; and it were better to leave them in a darkness to which no visions come than to vex and perturb their hearts with visions and fancies wholly vain. But it is the unique glory of Christ that, for every word of the witness He bears to our life's possible greatness, He gives also the practical inspiration which makes us strong to attain the greatness of which He speaks. We look on Him, and He bears witness to the loftiest spiritual facts and sacred realities—but we look on Him once more, and, so long as the sight of Him remains, we know that the sacred realities may be ours. He bears witness, for instance, to God, and to the fact that because we are God's children it is our privilege and our duty to be in our degree as God is and to share in our degree all that God possesses. And that conception of human life dwarfs—dwarfs utterly and makes contemptible—any and every other conception of it that thought can entertain. But vast as it is, as we look upon the Christ the rush of power and inspiration comes beneath which we know we can be and shall be truly children of God, measureless as the significance of being children of God is. He leads us into sonship, as well as bears witness to us that we are or ought to be sons. He never presents an ideal, but He gives also the consciousness that it can be realised: He never brings into view some sacred aim only to withdraw it again as being too remote for our

reaching; and always, when He lifts His voice as witness to speak of life's high meaning and life's glorious destiny, He lifts also His beckoning hand as leader to bid us be of good courage and press on.

There is nothing more remarkable than the fact that, while the Christly ideals and meanings of life are the most transcendent and noble possible, nobody feels and nobody seriously suggests that they are unpractical. In the Christ who speaks to us of such great things we recognise instinctively the power and inspiration which is sufficient for such great things. Usually ideals have to be lowered for practice. "Yes, that is what we should like to be, or that is what we should like to do. But we must work for something lower to begin with. *That* is too much to hope for." But not so here. Higher than anywhere else thought or aspiration has dared to soar is the view of life and life's meaning and life's destiny to which the Christ bears witness; and yet not in any one particular is it only to be talked about and dreamt about, but in every particular to be realised by those who will lay themselves open to the Christ's inspiration and who will follow where He leads. Behold, He is given as a leader to the peoples! In Him who bears the testimony abides for our taking the inspiration and the strength.

We forget sometimes that in everything whereof Christ speaks, He wants to lead us on. We hear the voice which tells of the highest things, but we do not see the beckoning hand which invites us to the highest things. We are awake to the witness, but we do not put ourselves under the leadership. Yet we

should prepare ourselves to follow on into all blessedness whereof our Christ speaks to us, else the witness He bears remains as a reproach to our lowness and sluggishness. The loftiest thoughts and hopes and aspirations which Christ imparts are only given that we may translate them into the actualities of our days. We *can* so translate them, if we take the inspiration for the doing of it from Him. He bears the witness: then He leads us forward till the things whereto the witness has been borne are true for us and in us. If the witness touches us and holds us and compels our faith in it, it is our part to follow the leading too.

Christ is leader.

And third, Christ is commander. When we have understood and accepted His witness to the highest and greatest things, and when we have found that from Him there descends upon us the inspiring influence beneath which we feel that the highest and greatest things may become ours, then He claims from us an entire submission, an absolute obedience. He does not ask for it without first proving His right to demand it: He does not claim to direct all our life and order all our activities until He has shown us that He possesses the secret and the power by which life and action may be directed and ordered aright: He is first witness and leader, before He takes the authority of a commander. But from those to whom the witness of the Christ has come with conviction and on whom the inspiration of the Christ has descended in might—from those the Christ asks next that their obedience be complete, and that all their

way shall be appointed in accordance with His command.

And we really need to be commanded. We see what life means, what life ought to be, according to the witness of Christ: we feel beating through us the mighty tides of power with which our leader inspires us, and we are persuaded that in striving to realise life's highest meanings we are following a quest which must and shall succeed at last. But it is only for a while we can preserve that perfect assurance and be conscious of that tide of inspiration. So weak and easily moved are we, that the strain of following on after the loftiest things soon grows too much for us, and we cannot keep ourselves under the incoming floods of power which descended upon us, and our confidence breaks down, and the high hopes and aims and purposes which appeared to be so near us recede and recede till they seem almost utterly lost. Our hearts are not great enough and strong enough to experience always the Leader's inspiration. But then the Christ comes to us in our lowness, and by His ever-present spirit commands us day by day, and bids us Do this! and Go here! and points out this duty and that responsibility, and tells us that by faithfulness and obedience to His command in these things we are little by little pressing forward to the furthest goal that life can reach. It is as though He said, "You see the great things to which I bear My witness, and you feel in some exalted moment the all-powerful inspiration of My leadership; but that dies in you after a while. Well, then I come to you to command every moment, to press one duty after

another upon you; and if you are faithful and true in these commands of Mine which daily come to you you will step forward toward those great things just as truly and surely as you would have done under that sense of mighty inspiration which you lost." When we look upon life's great meanings, life's great aims, and try in our hours of exaltation to reach them, it is like human vision seeking to look right into the heart of the sun. And as the dazzled eyes drop before the unbearable brightness, the Christ comes to us and says to us—"You cannot look upon that glory for long, but by My command I lead you on step by step toward it; and, though you cannot gaze upon it now, you shall reach it at last." The exalted hours when we feel that we can be and do great things come and go: the witness Christ bears to what we ought to be is so great as to overwhelm us sometimes: the strength and confidence with which, as leader, He inspires us so quickly passes. But the daily command remains; and to that at least we can seek to be faithful. Behold, He is given as commander to the peoples! Day by day the pressure of His Spirit upon us indicates the way by which in our obedience and faithfulness we may attain at length to the highest and the best.

There are some who will take the Christ as witness and leader, but not as commander. That He has brought to light for us the innermost secrets and meanings of human life is acknowledged: that the thought of Him and the speaking of Him may inspire mankind to noble struggles is acknowledged; but so many will use Christian principle and the Christian

spirit as they themselves please, yet will not be slaves to the Christ. That Christ's personality and the influence of Christ's personality have done much for the world is not disputed, but from the word "authority" men shrink away. Yet so something must surely be lost. We cannot look into our own natures without finding out that unless there be some spirit near to us whose dictates we can rely on and implicitly obey we can never realise all the possibilities that are in us. The man who is not willing to be ruled does not know much about himself. It is something more than a commonplace of religion—it is the result of a careful and accurate research into the depths of our souls—that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. And so I come back to this—that for the attaining of the best we know we need the constant pressure of *command* upon us, and the constant obedience of our hearts to it. Keep firm hold upon the witness Christ bears to our greatness and our destiny: believe for ever that you are meant for great and noble things: hold unfalteringly to the assurance which in our exalted and inspired moments comes on us, the assurance that the best we have ever seen afar off shall be ours some day. But work and win your way to the great destiny and the far-off good by steady, persistent faithfulness to the command which day by day and through many channels the Spirit of Christ imposes.

For not otherwise can we find rest. Our peace, our only peace, is in submission to this commanding authority of Christ's. Not much sweetness or restfulness in the word "authority" usually, perhaps;

but in *His* authority is refuge and rest. For He has been witness and leader first. The witness is of such great things that fear may mingle with the hope it brings: under the leading we may grow bewildered and fall back. But then He draws near again, with the quiet voice of command now; and "This is the way: walk ye in it," keeps us, if we listen and obey, in the path which leads to immortality and perfectness and God. Do the nearest duty, and do it always, and it will win the furthest, noblest grace the spirit can wear. Be faithful to the daily command, and be faithful always, and all the possibilities of perfection to which the Christ bears witness will be consummated for the faithful one in the end.

"Behold, I have given him for a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples."

V

SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death."—ROMANS viii. 2.

IT would be impossible, within the limits of an ordinary sermon, to bring out and express the fulness of meaning stored up in these words. It seems as though in them the apostle had gathered up and put into condensed form his whole idea concerning the nature and working and effect of the gospel of Christ. Whether or no he deliberately intended to do that, that at any rate is practically what he has done—given us in these words the key which unlocks the complicated intricacies of his thought upon the great subject of the Christian life, brought us in these words to the point of view from which he surveyed the wide extent of Christian doctrine and from which he took his bearings as to the method and direction of Christian influence upon his heart. Indeed, it is not too much to say that he who rightly and in any just measure comprehends what is involved in this statement of the text will have comprehended the essence of all Paul's teaching. The secret of the

verse before us, once drawn out, becomes a guide to make our mental journeyings direct and easy throughout the whole range of his utterances; and you will never come, in your reading of Paul, to a chain of reasoning so abstruse, or to a tangle of thought so complicated, or to a mystery of speech so deep, that the significance of this saying, if you fall back upon it for assistance, will not in some degree help you through.

Now, to sum up in brief form the contents of this verse, you have these three things: First, Paul's conception of the gospel of Christ as giving a *law* to life—"the *law* of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." Next, Paul's view of what obedience to that law means—a living in the *spirit* of Christ—"the law of the *Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*." And last, Paul's idea of the result which obedience produces—"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death."

Look at what is contained in each of these three things.

The gospel of Christ, according to Paul, gives a law to life. In order rightly to understand the significance of that fact, it is necessary to have a clear idea of what a law of life really is. Now, in our common usage we employ the word "law" in different senses, sometimes attaching it to the whole body of legislative enactments by which as a nation or society we are governed, sometimes taking it to signify a kind of restraint set by judicial authorities upon the elements of rebellion and disorder. We

view "law" more or less as the agent which regulates men's mutual relationships, the power set up for the preservation of right and the suppression or punishment of wrong. And we carry over these ideas of law, derived from our experience as members of a nation and citizens of a state, into the religious and spiritual realm. "Law" there, we think, means the moral proclamations of God, the sacred precepts of Jesus Christ, the whole collection of Divine commandments, with the rewards attached to their careful fulfilment and the penalties following upon their wilful neglect. But, right and true as within their limits these ideas of divine or Christian law undoubtedly are, they fail adequately to represent the fulness of the apostle's thought in this place. When he speaks of the law which the gospel of Christ has imposed upon him, he does not mean simply that the gospel of Christ has hedged him round with certain prohibitions and commands, set a limit to his action in this direction and urged him forward in that. In order to apprehend fully what was in his mind, we must rise to a larger conception and take a broader view. A law of life, in its innermost and essential meaning, is that which defines the programme of life's development and marks out the lines of life's progress: it is the unchanging plan of existence which underlies the life through all the stages of its growth and preserves the unity of them all: it is that which expands the bud into the flower and brings the oak-tree from the acorn, and makes the littleness and weakness of the child emerge into the stature and strength of the man. Everything follows a law of

life, inasmuch as it follows a direct course of development from its first beginnings to its ultimate and final aim. Now apply that idea to the Christian life, to life after the gospel of Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ gives a law to life because it provides for a direct and straightforward development of life. In its deepest, largest meaning the gospel of Christ gathers up all the elements of a man's inmost character, concentrates them upon an ideal of character which the gospel of Christ itself reveals, and draws them up toward it: it is the evolution of spiritual being in us, the drawing out of Christliness, the development of holy life. The law of life according to the gospel of Christ is the growth and progress of the inner life from Christly beginnings along Christly courses to Christly ends. It is not an external legislative enactment which binds us down, but an inward power which moulds us within. To live by that law is to unfold, from the first weak rudiments of holy things within us, the larger and fuller beauties of holy grace—to advance, by the silent but unmistakable processes of inward growth, from a character only just touched with the faint lights of Christian loveliness to a soul enriched with all the unspeakable glories that a Christian life can show.

The influence of the gospel of Christ, then, is in the direction of producing a development of spiritual character. That is the law which it imposes upon those who own its sway. Indeed, no other view of the influence of Christianity contains the idea of law at all. The gospel of Christ is to save men, you

say. True; but if you rest in the idea of a mere deliverance, if you mean by the word "salvation" simply being snatched from some impending fate, then you are not looking upon the gospel as a law of life. You have degraded it into a guarantee of immunity from possible harm, and do not see in it any provision for the production of purities of character or sanctities of soul. Not until you add to your first idea of being saved *from* a coming danger the further idea of being saved *to* an ultimate perfection which the gospel of Christ intends and enables you to reach—not until then does your idea of salvation include the idea of a law of character and life. Unless you look upon the influence of Christ as designed to supply a rule of inward progress and to mark the lines of inward growth, you have not grasped Paul's thought of Christ as giving a *law* to life. The influence of Christ's gospel is to guide our advance to an appointed completeness and perfection which, under its guidance, we cannot miss—to provide for the direct, undeviating forward movement of our soul and spirit toward the perfect good.

It would not be difficult to show, by a comparison of the apostle's words in this and many another place, that what I have sought to present was really Paul's view of the gospel—the law of the development of holy character. And even without travelling beyond the immediate surroundings of the text, you can see how, if this was his view of the gospel and its working, all that passionate crying of his soul and that oscillation of his spirit between triumph and despair, to which the preceding chapter bears

a witness so pathetic—you can see how all that is explained. He delights in the law of God "after the inward man," but there is another power, a power of sin, within him, which every now and again drags him down into captivity to its imperious might. That is, the power of God and of the gospel of Christ is at work within him to produce and draw out the beauties of holiness, to direct the whole tendency and growth of his being above; and all the sympathies of the man are directed to the same object when he is true to himself. He delights in the law of God after the inward man. Only, because his will—set as it is upon the attainment of holiness—cannot take all the powers and capabilities of his nature with it, there is the ceaseless conflict between the law of Christ's gospel, which impels him up, and the tendency of the flesh, as he calls it—of the unpurified and unredeemed instincts of his being—which drags him down. And does not our experience confirm the apostle's account of his? We, too, feel how the law of the gospel of Christ, the law of spiritual growth, is checked by the hindrance of downward and sinful tendencies we cannot overcome: we, too, could cry out, when the struggle is bitter and the issue doubtful to our thought, "Who shall deliver us out of the body of this death?" and our pain of spirit is sharp as the apostle's was, our tears of despair quick and sincere as his. And with him and with us that inward struggle bears witness to this fact—that the gospel of Christ brings in a new growth of character, opens up little by little the full development of holiness from the first beginnings of grace, and through the conflict

of antagonistic elements and the hostility of opposing impulses in the soul, guides steadily onward the progress of the spirit toward God.

The gospel gives a law to life — the law of development of spiritual and Christly character.

Pass now to Paul's view of what obedience to this law involves. It is a living in the spirit of Jesus Christ—"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." In order to ensure that development of Christly character which the law of Christ's gospel aims to produce, we must live in the spirit of Christ. You notice how the apostle is careful, in the midst of all his reasoning, to lay stress upon the personal element in the relationship of the Christian disciple to the Christian life: he keeps constantly before the attention of his readers the fact that the personal influence of Christ Himself is the all-important factor in that relationship; and in their ideas of Christian methods and Christian practice, he will allow nothing merely mechanical to find room. He insists on Christianity as giving a law: it is not, however, a law which does its work in blindness, but a law of the spirit of life, leaving free play for the exercise of human volition and the conscious adjustments of human power—and a law, besides, which centres in and carries you back to the influence and authority of a personal Lord—the spirit of life *in Christ Jesus.* We secure for ourselves a growth of Christly character as we set ourselves under the personal influence of Christ Himself: it is the perfectness in Him that is to draw out and fulfil the aspirations after perfectness in us:

it is from Him that there comes forth the attracting force to draw us upward, and it is to Him that our mounting spirits return. The law of Christ's gospel operates through the personal influence of Christ Himself. "The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus"—that is the secret our experience is to realise.

Now, we live in the spirit of Jesus Christ when we set our lives to the principles which controlled His, live from the same motives as He, acknowledge the same inspirations and answer to the same guiding impulses from above. To live in the spirit of Christ is something far larger and deeper than a mere imitation of His actions: there is no virtue in merely saying His words and doing His deeds, even if down to the minutest particular we could say and do them; and to transfer the external colouring and aspect of His life to ours is a process that could have little or no influence upon character, and would do absolutely nothing to make the law of Christian progress and development realised within us. It is in the inward attitude of mind and heart toward purity and righteousness that we are to be like Christ: to live in His spirit is to be open and free, as He was, to every passing breath of God—to thrill, as He did, responsive to every touch of a holy presence—to wait, as He waited, prepared for the coming of any sacred voices from on high—to stand at His side, one with Him in His absolute inward surrender to eternal righteousness and truth, one with Him in the homage of His heart and the bowing of His spirit before the supremacy of the purity of God. And thus, united with Him there at the springs of life, we

pass within the range of the influence and power He exerts: so living in His spirit, we attain slowly to the perfectness manifested in its fulness in Him; and, through the ascending steps of the life in the spirit of Christ Jesus, the law of Christ's gospel is realised and embodied in us.

We experience a growth of Christly character, then, by being baptized with and living in the spirit of Jesus Christ. And you will see, if you think of it, that this participation in the spirit of Christ is really the only imitation of Him that is possible to us. I insist on that because too often we mean, by the imitation of Christ, the simple copying of His outward life. It is a similarity in the visible ordering of our lives to the ordering of His, not a oneness of the inward motive which reigns over us with the motive which reigned over Him, that we strive after. To walk in the footsteps of the Master is too frequently held to be just the diligent reproduction of His actions and His words. Now you see that if by the imitation of Christ we intend only such a mechanical repetition of His life as that, there are very few things indeed in which we can imitate Him at all. In many, indeed in all, of the sublimest experiences of His earthly course He must stand alone. The outward details of His temptation, the miraculous powers He could summon to His aid, the sharp pangs of His passion, the bitterness of His cross or the triumph of His rising — all these things are entirely remote from the plane of our experience, and in these points our history cannot resemble His. Moreover, as I said, a mere external resemblance,

though it were never so exact, could do little or nothing to spiritualise character, to realise in us the *law* of the gospel of Christ. But you take that other idea of which I spoke—the idea that a true imitation of Jesus Christ means a living in the spirit which filled Him; and at once every incident in His life has its lesson for us, speaks with a voice of exhortation and command, and touches the deepest springs of life in us to cleanse them. You stand before the tragedy of His death: it is in that He is furthest from us, wrapped in a lonely grandeur we cannot approach. How can we be like Him in the experience of that supreme hour? We have not a world to redeem: for us no call to martyrdom has come: must we say that the possibility of Christly imitation stops short for us just when Christ reaches the point where He is greatest, and is cut off just as He manifests the divinest qualities of self-sacrifice and love? Not so: though we be not bent, as He was, beneath the weight of any cross on which we are to die—though we be not summoned, as He was, to become obedient unto death—yet the spirit that lay behind His voluntary giving up of Himself may dwell in us, the spirit of perfect willingness to suffer or die even with the very bitterest accompaniments that suffering or death can bring; and so we may know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, and so be made conformable unto Christ's death. And if we once accept and seek to live by that spirit of complete self-surrender, it becomes one of the moulding forces of character, working in us to produce the graces of Christliness and the beauties of a spiritual

life. Thus, as we live in the spirit of Christ, the law of Christ's gospel—the law of the growth of Christly character—has free course within us. And the influence of every incident in the life of the Christ is to work in the same way. Always pass from the word or the act itself to the spirit which it manifested, admit that spirit among the governing powers of your nature, and let it do its part to guide your courses and shape your ways; and thus everything in Christ's life comes to have its spiritual counterpart in yours. You are like Him, not in the outward machinery and detail of existence, but in the spirit that inspires and moves the whole. This is the true imitation of Jesus Christ: this is the spirit of life in Christ Jesus—to acknowledge the same directing voices as He, to live by the same inspirations, to follow the same guiding lights.

Well, Paul says that if you would realise and obey the law of the gospel, if you would set your inward life in the direction of spiritual progress, you must thus make your existence the spiritual counterpart of that of Christ. "The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus."

Now look at what Paul states to be the result of obedience to the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. "The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death." That is, he claims deliverance from the rule of sin because he has given himself to the rule of the spirit of Christ: because he is living in the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, he has secured for himself that his pro-

gress shall be according to the law of spirituality and Christliness, and he is consequently free from the law of evil. The forward movement of his life is toward holiness, not toward sin. Not, of course, that he is altogether emancipated from the retarding and disturbing influences of evil; for, as we have seen, his consciousness of the presence of evil rises sometimes to an almost overwhelming height. But evil comes now as an intrusion, and does not rule as a law: formerly, it was the acknowledged sovereign, while now it is the usurper seeking to regain the throne it has lost. The *law* of his life is the law of spiritual progress; and, spite of passing tumults, he is free from the law of sin. Not free from its occasional visitations, but free from its *law*.

And with the apostle, we too, if we be living by the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, may rejoice in freedom, not indeed from the recurring entrances of evil into our experience, but from the tyranny of its constant sway. For all who seek to live in the spirit of Jesus Christ hold this as the guarantee of their ultimate perfection—that every life in which there is a dominant purpose of good is in harmony with the will and purposes of God; and, so long as God is what He is, and remains true to Himself, no purpose of good can ever fail. In yielding ourselves to the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus we commit ourselves to the faithfulness of God; for He has pledged Himself—by the proclamation of righteousness in the voices of conscience, by the supremacy of righteousness in the established arrangements of His moral government, by the frequent

vindication and crowning of righteousness in the history of the world—God has pledged Himself that every effort after righteousness and Christliness must reach its aim. Live in the spirit of Jesus Christ, and here and now you are made free from the dominion of all to which the spirit of Jesus Christ is alien and strange: it may touch you, but cannot claim you for its own; and through all the struggles, be they never so passionate and never so fierce, by which the dethroned evil seeks to reassert its lost authority—through all the tears of repentance for the sudden fall which has overtaken us unawares—through the alternations of joy for temptation vanquished and of sorrow for temptation to which our wavering wills submit—through it all our striving spirits win their way, sure of their ultimate rest in the perfect righteousness of God.

But I come back at the last to the personal impulse of it all in Jesus Christ. For in Him lies the love which can comfort us when we have sought to give ourselves to the dominion of His spirit, and have seemed to fail. It is a life in the spirit of Christ Jesus we seek to possess; and I cannot speak of such a life as that—none of us can speak or think of it—and remember the inexpressible beauty and sweetness of it, without an almost overwhelming rush of shame. "The spirit of life in Christ Jesus"—far enough from that are we, far enough from its sweet and hallowed quietude—far, unutterably far, how far God only knows—from its holiness and tender grace. And in the sadness of our failure He, the Christ

Himself, is the source of consolation and the Inspirer of hope. He stands, not far from any one of us, with the voice of encouragement for our weakest efforts and the gentle word of forgiveness for our most grievous faults. It is the living, personal Christ, throned at the centre of our life, from whom our inspiration comes and to whom our spirit's progress tends. From the deepest depths of failure or from the darkest abysses of despair, if we do but stretch imploring hands to Him, the failure and despair are swept away as though they had never been. So, by the constant presence and changeless love of Christ Himself, we are baptized with the spirit of life in Him, set free to surmount the highest slopes of God's righteousness and to climb the loftiest summits of Christly grace.

VI

THE SOUL'S CALLING ITS OWN SECRET

"But when it was the good pleasure of God, who . . . called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles: immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me: but I went away into Arabia."—GALATIANS i. 15–17.

PAUL is here vindicating the divine origin and authority of his apostleship against those who had questioned his title to occupy an apostle's place. He claims that the words he speaks were given to him by the direct communication of Heaven, without the interposition of any human or intermediate agencies: he bases his right to have his spiritual authority recognised upon the intimacy of the relationship in which God has met him; and he recalls, by way of substantiating his claims to apostolic status, the circumstances which had made his conversion and his call entirely exceptional and unique. No earthly voices of counsel or instruction, he says, had intruded themselves upon him: no earthly presences were at hand when his new Christian allegiance began to determine his courses and shape his inward life.

Flesh and blood had revealed nothing to him: even they who possessed experience in these things, they who were apostles before him, had no share in the moulding of his destinies; but Paul had retired into the Arabian desert, and had listened there, in the silences and solitudes, to the heavenly voices that had told him what God would have him to do. "Who shall dare," he seems to ask, "to question the validity of such an ordination as that—an ordination wherein no hands of men, but the invisible touch of God, consecrated me, and wherein the anointing and sanctifying influence was the breath of the Eternal Spirit?" In secret God had spoken to him. It was as he had stood in God's unveiled presence that his spiritual inspirations had come.

Forgetting for a while, however, the purpose which Paul had most immediately in view when he wrote these words, I want to see what lesson the words of the text have to teach to us. Paul, when he heard and realised his sacred call, conferred not with flesh and blood, nor went up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before him. He faced the new issues of his life without any human aid.

The Christian life, the spiritual life (this is, in brief, the lesson) is an intensely personal and individual matter. The call that comes to you and your obedience to the call are just a secret between yourself and God. We have to find out for ourselves how our spiritual life is to develop and form itself: there is no programme you can draw up and publish as binding upon all who would fulfil the requirements of Christian

service ; nor is it demanded that the sacred summons, when we have heard and obeyed it, should affect us all in precisely the same manner or work in all of us exactly similar results. You will see what I am referring to if you remind yourselves of the efforts we do so often make to force our spiritual development along lines where it is not meant to go. We know that some one who, like ourselves, is seeking to be faithful to the highest—we know that he is possessed by emotions of a certain quality and intensity : we hear how he expresses his spiritual experience in language of some particular cast ; and we strive to produce within ourselves, forgetting the utter foolishness of the attempt, feelings similar to his, and take upon our lips words which in him may be spontaneous and sincere, but which in our utterance of them may be little else than an unreal hypocrisy. We confer with flesh and blood : we try to model our inward life after what we see in another. Nay, so completely is it forgotten that God's callings take account of the individual natures to which they come, and that the call He sends to me may summon me over ways totally different from those whereon you tread—so completely is that sometimes forgotten, that a spiritual experience which does not express itself in conventional methods nor bear the ordinary tokens, is viewed with a certain amount of suspicion, or even, in many instances, held to be untrue. Ah ! but when we yield ourselves to holy inspirations, it does not mean that our characters are, as it were, run into a common mould or stamped with a common pattern. God may call you, and you may answer to the call and

lift up your eyes to behold Him; but perhaps you may have a vision of Him totally different from the vision given to me; and according to our visions, according to the aspect in which each one of us has seen Him, will He control and affect our lives. One may grasp God by intellect, reaching up to Him through reasoning processes and exercises of thought. Another may be conscious of God coming near to him through the avenues of sensibility and feeling, be touched by the wonder of His majesty, overawed by the immeasurableness of His power. Yet another may be held to God by the influences of love, and may be constantly filled with the experiences of His tenderness and grace, find the sweetness of a personal relationship with God the dominant factor in his spiritual consciousness. And so you get various types of the spiritual life, according to the various aspects in which various hearts behold God. Thus it must always be. Never forget that your path heavenward is a path you must discover for yourself; and you will fall halting and lame if you force your feet into the tracks where others go. The pass-word which will open all the doors for you on your upward progress you must learn immediately from the voice of God: no one else can tell it you; for the talisman which overcomes your brother's difficulties will be powerless for you. We have to solve our own riddles. When we stand face to face with the deepest problems of our spiritual being, it is vain to confer with flesh and blood.

It is only by thus looking upon the determination of our spiritual destinies as a problem which each

one of us has to face for himself, that we can keep the idea of God's dealings with us, God's ministry within us, being a life. Paul speaks of what God did in him as the revealing of the Son in him ; and the very phrase implies the privacy, the individual character, of the process. How could you reduce the working of a living Christ within you into conformity with some particular rule, or restrain the exercise of Christ's power in you to certain carefully-defined lines? That phrase "the revealing of the Son" in us means that the Christian life is simply the Christianising of our energies, the Christ showing Himself forth in our faculties, using our special, particular capabilities for His own purposes. You give yourself to the call of Christ: you remain in faculty, in capability, in temperament, just the same man you were before: only in the spirit which beats through the faculty and capability and temperament the Christ who now directs them is revealed. And so, again, you get various types of the Christian life and character, according to the fundamental characteristics of the nature of the man. It is not that there is some definite external pattern to which Christ requires His servants outwardly to conform, but rather that He takes His servants just as they are, with all their idiosyncrasies of character, and stamps the Christly mark upon their energies and powers, turns them to Christly uses. And so, to realise the apostle's conception of the Christian life, we have to look, not away upon others, trying to shape our experiences by what we see of theirs, but inward upon ourselves, seeking to discover how our

natures may be most perfectly devoted to show forth the tokens of the indwelling Christly presence. The Christ will reveal Himself in you in ways different from those wherein He reveals Himself in me: though we be both alike possessed by His spirit, the manifestation of it will be unlike in each; and we have to discover for ourselves how we may best give ourselves to His rule. To find the method of the revelation of the Son in us, we can derive but little assistance from conference with flesh and blood.

I want you to notice how this thought of the essentially private and individual character of spiritual processes in the human heart deepens our responsibility, makes the spiritual life altogether a more solemn thing. Somehow the ordinary views of the Christian life often leave us too easily satisfied. When, as I have said before, we take it as involving the possession of certain feelings, as requiring the employment of certain phrases, we force ourselves into the use of the conventional words, we persuade ourselves that the necessary emotions have taken possession of our hearts, and we rest content with these utterly trivial matters, forgetting the more important aspects, the deeper and weightier concerns, of the spiritual life. But once realise that God's call to you is something you have to face absolutely alone! Solemn, indeed, is it to know that we are shut away with the ministries which God exercises upon us, and have to give ourselves up to their working and derive unaided from them the good they are meant to bring—that impassable lines are

drawn round the place where God meets us and summons us to stand face to face with Him—that as we bow before that majestic Presence, waiting for the sacred commands, all human companionships have to be left far away. To work out our salvation becomes an unspeakably solemn matter when we understand that no human voice can give us counsel as to the lines whereon the working is to be done. Realise the burden you take upon yourself when you give yourself to God, and do not too lightly face the task of carrying it! It may be that some will never attain their spiritual destiny in its highest blessedness, that some, though calling themselves by the name of Christ, will fail to reach the loftiest heights to which their Master summons them, because they do not understand the supreme solemnity and importance of the demands which Christian discipleship brings. Guard against that possibility of final loss and failure. Remember that you may be like others in many things which you wrongly consider the essentials of Christian experience (which for others may be essentials, though not for you) and yet may not attain their Christian blessedness at the last. You may force the current of your feelings into the same channels as theirs: you may say "Amen" to their words; and yet you may not have truly answered to your Master's call. Keep ever before you the thought that the responsibility resting upon you cannot be delegated to another or discharged at second-hand. What you have to do is to pass from human companionships, to hear Christ's voice in your loneliness, and to interpret it for yourself.

But if it intensifies the responsibility of the spiritual life to remember that it is for each of us a thing entirely personal to himself, no less does it deepen the sweetness and joy of the spiritual life. God enters into a far tenderer, a far more blessed relationship with us when we take Him as coming down to each one, as it were calling each one by name, laying each one's duty upon him by a separate, individual command. Think how far away we keep Him if we take obedience to His voice to be just that conforming to a general pattern of conduct and feeling of which I spoke before. He has spoken from His distant heaven and issued His commands, but He does not visit His children in intimate ministries of guidance and instruction: He remains in His infinite distances, and holds aloof from the closest personal communion with those who strive to do His will. When we look upon the fulfilment of sacred calls as being simply the adoption of some current, stereotyped programme which has come to have sacred associations through the usage of years, religion is little else than a mechanical thing and God little more than a name. But you take the idea which Paul hints at here, the idea that the spiritual destiny, the sacred duty, of every soul is something it must find out for itself. "God," you can say, "has some special message for me. To me there will come a voice no other ear has ever heard: for me there is reserved some revelation no other eye has ever beheld; and the Fatherly discipline will take account of all wherein my life differs from others', will remember its special burden, give scope to its

special strength, allow for its special weakness." How much more beauty there is in the life of obedience to the highest, when God does not stand outside, and command from there the band who have given themselves to Him, but comes down and mingles with them, passes from heart to heart, even changing His word according to the need and character of each one to whom He speaks! Lay hold on the sweetness of this intimate personal relationship: every one who seeks to be faithful to the heavenly summons can claim it for his own. We are not bidden simply to hear a great voice out of Heaven proclaiming Heaven's command, and then left to carry it out as best we can; but we are guided by One who takes our hand in His, and knows His sheep by name. Sweeter far is it to know that God fits His revelation to the need and capacity of the individual spirit, than to be given over to some rule imposed on all alike, without regard to the special circumstance of this one or that. This is the beauty and sweetness of the spiritual life—that as we seek to live it, we are not merely partakers in a common heritage of divine help, but are possessed of our own wealth of sacred love. The individual character, the privacy, of the soul's pursuit of duty, deepens the graciousness of it, because it sets us into contact with some special ministry, peculiarly our own, of the tenderness of God.

Do not be content, therefore, with simply fulfilling what are currently recognised as the essential conditions of a Christian life. Let your experience be

profounder than that. Remember that Christian duty may be a totally different thing for you from what it is for your neighbour. And, on the other hand, do not be disquieted because your spiritual experience develops itself along lines varying from those conventionally reputed to be correct. Every discipleship has its own incommunicable secrets—has, I was going to say, its own Christ. Paul, when he wanted to ascertain where the divine leadings would take him, "conferred not with flesh and blood." He knew that to him alone could the revelation be given. The spiritual life is an intensely individual thing: it is the Holy of Holies where you meet God alone.

But just a few words about what Paul did in order to discover how the new spiritual powers to which he had yielded himself should control him. "I went away into Arabia." He retired into the desert. Solitude was the environment wherein he could best hear the voice of God. Now we, of course, cannot go into any desert. A literal imitation of the apostle's procedure is not possible for us. Yet we can obtain from his method some hint for our own. We need to retire into solitude in the sense of keeping, at the centre of our life, some sacred place to which the influences of the world are not permitted to approach, which is reserved for God. What we have to do is to keep so thorough a mastery over ourselves that while we discharge our earthly responsibilities and answer to our earthly calls, these things may be held away from the inmost centres of

thought and life. We want something of the mystic's spirit, which could dissociate itself from its immediate surroundings, and enter at once into another world; and deep down, beneath the life which men see and which connects us with them, we must preserve another life which is wholly surrendered to God While the world's noise is loud around us, while the tempests of worldly occupation and anxiety beat upon us, we must be able to turn away from all these things and in the quiet deeps of our being to hear other voices and meet with other presences. We talk of retiring within ourselves sometimes; and only by retiring within ourselves, just as Paul retired into the desert, can we receive the revelations which God has to give. And you know, too, how it is a fact verified by experience that in our times of trouble God comes nearer to us and His utterances appeal far more powerfully to us, than in our times of unalloyed joy. Why is it? Because in those oppressed hours the earth recedes from our consciousness and becomes less real, less prominent in our thought: when the connections which bind us to the outer environment are loosened, we fall back into the depths of our natures, and God comes to us there. Our experiences of sorrow are just God sending us into the desert, that He may give us His revelation there. Into the desert—ah, He has to drive us all there sometimes! "I fling My darkness round you," He says, "and then the light of My face comes out. The world possesses you too completely; and I break this link and that link by which you are fastened to the world, so that you may realise the

attachments which your inner life should have to Me." By our trials He calls us into the solitudes. And we should seek so to live that, without compulsion, without the pressures of heaviness or affliction, we may keep an inward sensitiveness that always apprehends the divine presence, an inward sight that for ever beholds God's face. Keep your earthly circumstances at a distance from the centre of your life. Preserve always a temple in your heart which is never profaned by worldly intrusions, whither you can withdraw for sacred converse. Would you receive and properly apprehend the revelations God designs for you, you must be able always to retire within yourself.

Fall back upon these secret communings with your God, when you would solve the spiritual problems of your life. Oh! if you know anything of the way in which God speaks to us when we can sever ourselves from the world for an hour, you will say that Paul was right in making the true revelations come to us in solitude! When we have seen everything earthly flash away, when we have forgotten everything except that divine light which burns into our soul and that divine voice which falls upon our waiting hearts—when our nature answers to the sacred influences as the ocean-tides answer to the drawings of the controlling moon that sways them—then there come to us the inspirations which are the strength of all our days! And you cannot tell your experience to another: it perishes on your lips as you seek to utter it: the attempt to express in human speech what God says to us in the moments when

we stand face to face with Him is like the vain effort to recall a dream. But to ourselves the experience has been most real. To each one of us, in our own solitudes, God gives the visitation of His glory: below the currents of circumstance He meets the seeking heart; and the vision we have beheld, the message God has given, remain the incommunicable possession of ourselves alone.

And I want you to notice that it was by this solitary communion that Paul prepared himself for the ministry to which he was called. "When it was the good pleasure of God . . . to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles." Paul came forth from the desert equipped, by what befell him there, for the enterprise of missionary labour he was about to undertake. We must have had our own spiritual vision (we so often forget this) before we can serve effectually. Underneath all noble efforts and worthy ministerings lie a hidden, unspeakable experience. Only as we have met with God in some hour when He has told us some secret of His, can we show Him forth in power to the world. To prepare ourselves for the task of making others spiritual, we must go into the desert. When you see one in whose efforts Christian influences are revealed with a new attractiveness, on whose lips utterances of spiritual things take a new sweetness and beauty, you may know that he derives his inspiration from some nameless, unseen bond between his spirit and God's. In proportion to the personal, individual character of our communion with God is our

power of being God's ministers and priests among men.

Strive, then, to make your own this depth of spiritual experience which comes only to the heart in its loneliness. God has some pearl of great price to bestow upon you which no one else knows or can know anything about. Let your relation with God take on the intimacy which belongs to the relation of two friends who are all the world to each other. God comes to you, and deals with you, as though there were no one else to share His love. Let your consciousness of His presence be distinctively and emphatically your own. Let us pass into the secret chambers at the innermost recesses of our natures: God will meet us there. He has one message for you, another message for me: let each one hear his own appointed word. Only thus will our spiritual destinies be perfectly fulfilled.

VII

PEACE THROUGH GOD'S INTERFERENCE

"Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river."—ISAIAH xlviii. 18.

I SUPPOSE our usual notion of peace is to be left to ourselves. When anybody crosses our path too often, or interferes with us so that we cannot altogether do what we want to do and carry out our own plans, we are apt to say, "Oh, leave me in peace." When demand after demand is made upon us, and knocks at the door become too frequent, indicating with irritating persistence that there is some one else wishing us to do this thing or the other, going to take up a little more of the time which seems to us so valuable and to hamper our freedom of action with some fresh restraint, we cry out, "What would I not give if only I could get a little peace!" To be able to do what we like—never to hear any voice calling a halt to us when we want to start out on the paths we have mapped out for ourselves—to have no obstacles put in the way of the exercise of our own energy or the fulfilment of our own will—to keep all impertinent intrusions at a respectful distance—that

seems to us to be peace. We are at peace when we are left comfortably to ourselves.

This verse tells us that peace comes to us, not by being left to ourselves, but by being interfered with. "Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! *then* had thy peace been as a river." It was just because God's people had kept themselves to themselves that they had lost their peace: if they had permitted themselves to be interfered with a little more—if they had permitted God to interfere with them a little more—their peace would have been secured to them. Here is One knocking at the door, who knocks, not that He may upset the whole household when we let Him in, and take its quietude away, but that by His very intrusion He may bring quietude in. Peace consists, not in bidding Him begone, so that we may relapse into our self-centred life again, but in flinging the door wide, so that He may come in and set things in order for us. We win our peace by allowing God to interfere with us, to overturn all our intention and planning it may be, to command us rather than to leave us to ourselves. And though at first, when we open the door to His knocking and let Him come in and transform all the ordering and arrangement of the house, it may appear that we have admitted Discord rather than Quietude, yet, when the first strain of submitting ourselves to His commanding is past, we find that the God who upsets all our devices and intentions, and so seems to bring disorder, is really the Author and Giver of truest repose, is Himself the Angel of Peace.

Will you notice first the lesson this verse teaches as to what peace really is; and then its other lesson —that the true peace is only to be obtained by letting God interfere with us, by hearkening to His commandments. Peace—true peace—not through being left to ourselves, but through the interference of God.

First, the lesson the verse teaches as to what peace really is. "Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river"—*as a river.* And the river travels calmly on from source to sea: its peace is not the peace of stagnation, nor even the peace of being still; for its motion is unending and its work never done. But it has the peace of *self-fulfilment.* It, so to say, knows its work, and does it: it has its goal, and presses toward it: it does not lose itself nor spend itself in vain. So peace for us lies in self-fulfilment. When our life passes straight on from Source to Goal—or at any rate, when our life, if its course be not straight altogether, through all its windings keeps its Goal in sight, and tends toward it although the windings be many and long—then we are at peace. When in all calmness, with no fever and no fretfulness, our life fulfils itself worthily, and by fulfilling itself, fulfils the purpose for which it was given—then we are at peace. When our life empties itself, through the constant flow of word and thought and work in our days, into the great ocean of life around us, as the river pours itself into the sea, and helps to keep it full and rich —then we are at peace. The peace which God wants

us to have—the only peace which is worth having—is the peace of self-fulfilment, the peace which is as a river. Not stagnation, not even rest; but a steady onward flowing of life from Source to End.

And the constant dissatisfaction in our life means that we are not thus fulfilling ourselves. There is not much of the "river" in our life: rather might our living be likened to the heaving and tossing of the troubled seas. How we are always trying experiments, as it were, to see if we cannot find out the right way to live; and we do not bring our experimenting to any satisfactory conclusion by the time the call comes to shut up the laboratory and give an account of what we have accomplished! How we start in that direction, and then presently say half-hesitatingly, "*That* cannot be right, after all," and then come back and try the other path, and halt again after a few steps and retrace them; till the evening shadows descend and find us pretty much where we were at dawn! Peace! Nay, it is to and fro, and up and down, and backward and forward—and that is our life. Not like the river, peaceful in its very labour, at rest in its very restlessness, because its method is stable and its course is fixed—not like the river are we. With our experimentings and our failures, and our beginnings and our incompletenesses, we have not entered into peace.

And then, because we weary of this constant effort which appears to have so little definiteness in it, and grow sore-hearted because we seem to be carried hither and thither, the sport of circumstances and the prey of the spirit of chance, we long and long for

what appears to us to be peace. "If only there were nothing resting upon us! If only the arms could hang listlessly, and the brain had not to rouse itself to think, and we could wrap ourselves up in a quietude to which no voice should come, and might pass our days away as though in a slumber visited only by pleasant dreams!" I suppose it comes to all of us at times. But that is not peace—at any rate it is certainly not peace worthy of our seeking. What our life needs is not idleness, but direction—not to be delivered from its tasks, but to have all its tasks and enterprises fitted together, fitted into one another, so that we may accomplish something worth accomplishing by means of them; and that would be peace. To find ourselves—to fulfil ourselves—to make out of our life a straight advance, at least a real advance, even though there be occasional windings in its course—that is what we want. Do not think of peace as any smaller or meaner thing than that. It is not to be left to ourselves, with no claims pressing upon us and no responsibilities lying upon our hearts. It is to know our tasks, and to possess the strength to do them without fever or fret. It is to see our way, and to walk in it, without disheartening ourselves by ceaseless questionings whether the way we tread be right. To have *direction* in our life—definiteness, direction—that is peace. To be as the river, flowing on in fulfilment of the law of its own being, effortless and undisturbed—that is peace. And that is the peace of which God holds the secret, and which He wants us to possess.

And this peace of self-fulfilment comes to us through obedience: that is the other lesson of the text. Our lives obtain that definiteness, that worthy direction, that purposefulness, wherein the true peace lies, when we hearken to the commandments of God. We fulfil the law of our own being, when we fulfil the higher law imposed on us from above. Our life's true peace consists in having true direction given to life: true direction is given to our life only by our constant submission to God's will.

To fulfil ourselves by taking our life's direction from outside of ourselves—from God. That is the secret. Peace is making our life the straight advance to the fulfilment of an aim—is that all? So some have thought and said. That is the message of a great deal of the old stoical philosophy of life. Fulfil yourself—carry out the law of your being—make your days to be the unhindered on-tending towards a goal—so you will possess yourself in peace. But that is not the whole message of religion. The call of religion is a higher call—yet in another sense a lower call too, since it sends man into a lower place. Fulfil yourself, but find out how to do that by listening to the voice which issues its commands from on high! Carry out the law of your being, but learn what the law of your being is from the proclamations of the law of God! Make your days to be the unhindered on-tending towards a goal, but look up to another wisdom than your own, that it may teach you what that goal should be! "Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river." You cannot get direction

definiteness, purposefulness into your life, in such wise as to be delivered from disturbance and unrest, except by submission to God's will.

So many miss their peace because this part of the lesson remains unlearnt. That peace lies in having a definite and worthy aim, whose attainment life may seek as the river seeks the sea—that is often learnt. "Then cannot I find my purpose for myself? Is it not enough that I should say, *This* is the aim on which all my life and energy shall be bent? Will not that secure that my peace shall be abiding and complete?" Nay, for we cannot fulfil our own life rightly till we relate ourselves rightly to the Eternal Life in which all other lives are gripped. The striving after our purpose will not bring peace to us unless our purpose bear upon it the seal of God. We may be seeking to give definiteness, definite aim, definite meaning, to our life, but there can be no peace in that unless we have made sure that the aim and meaning are what God intended our life to possess; and if there be over us One who holds our days in the hollow of His hand, no order or arranging by which we may strive to make our days restful can be worth anything unless it conform to His will. Purpose, definiteness, self-fulfilment—that is peace; but we can get the reality of these things only by hearkening to the commandments of God, since we live and move and have our being in His grasp.

And it is for this that God wants us to obey—only in order that we may find our lives turned into definite channels, flowing on with the river's calm purposefulness, and so may be at peace. God wants

us to hearken to His commandments only that peace may come to us—for nothing else. He asks us to obey Him, not only because He claims our obedience as His right, but because He wants us to make something worthy out of our life, and because He knows that only by obeying Him can we do it. "I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit," He says to His people here. "Which teacheth thee *to profit*." He did not want them to suppose that He was laying His commands upon them simply to assert His authority, or to restrain their freedom, or to cripple their powers: it was for their own profiting that He interfered with them; and through God's deep yearning desire that His people should do the best for themselves was He moved to lay His hand upon them in direction and command.

So always, God commands us only that we may profit. Not because He wants to prevent us from doing this or that, but because He wants to help us to do things better, does He come to us and say, "Not that way, but this." And what makes obedience so hard to us is our failure to realise and understand that. Peace through obedience!—why, it is just through the effort to obey that our peace appears to be destroyed, we fancy. It is just when we set ourselves to try and fulfil the commands of God that there descends upon us the restlessness of storm and strain and war: if we are going to obey, it is always fightings without and within: what with the reluctance of our own hearts, and the force of circumstances, and the thousand other things that make it such a burden to do God's will, such a harpship to

obey, where is the peace of it? Should we not be more at peace if we could follow the devices and desires of our own hearts, without having these insistent duty-calls, these never-silent voices reminding us of higher claims, these constant interruptions of sacred authority? Surely it is just these things that spoil the peacefulness of our experience, is it not?

So it seems to us very often. But it seems so to us, just because we have not learnt to look on God's interference with us as coming from His desire that we should make the most and best of our life. He comes in here and there, it appears to us, and stops us just when we are on the road to what would satisfy us and wrap our souls in peace, and He turns us aside, and bids us go on this other path. And we grow fretful over it, and our hearts seem storm-tossed again just when the quiet harbour was almost gained, and the coming in of God's will has turned everything upside down for us, and peace is further away than ever. That is our short-sighted view of it. We look on God's commandments as a disturbance of the even currents of our life: it is when we have almost succeeded in making satisfaction and peace for ourselves that He rends it from our grasp again; and we have not accustomed ourselves to look on His interference with us as being only that He may teach us to profit. So our obedience to His will is half-reluctant, not founded on a perfect trust; and in such an obedience no peace can be. If we had learnt the lesson that God wants us to hearken to His commandments, not that we may be hindered, but

that we may be helped—not because He loves to check and curb and draw us back, but because He wants to forward our destiny and inspire and strengthen us to consummate it to the full—then our obedience to His commandments would wrap us in utter peacefulness and calm. He comes to us, not to impose on us galling checks, and prohibitions against which in rebelliousness we chafe, and restrictions which prevent us from accomplishing anything, but that He may teach us to profit, that He may lead us in the way by which we should go. And that must we unceasingly remember, would we know the peace which obedience can bring. The submission which is based on an assurance that God wants only to help us—that is the submission which enters into the peace that is as a river. The commandments of God are not a restraining law which says, "Thou shalt not": they are the inspirations by which our life is made most surely and most peacefully to reach its appointed end. "I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go."

Of course some struggle there must be for us, if we hearken to God's commandments and seek to obey. But the struggle will be on the surface only, and in the deep places of our life peace will reign. The wayward impulses not quite subdued may trouble us now and again: the winds of temptation may for a moment ruffle the placid courses of our life; but beneath it all the main current of life keeps its peaceful way unhindered, just as the river, in spite of restless ripple or rougher wave which on its sur-

face the eye may behold, flows on unhindered to the sea.

But is there not some unreality about all this?—are we inclined to question? Does God speak now? Is the revelation of His commandments as clear and as constant to us to-day as it was to these people all those years back? "Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river"—but there is a sort of flavour of antiquity about it, is there not? How shall we, who have our common life broken through by no sudden sacred revelations, who pass along our ordinary paths day after day and are never thrilled by any arresting call from heaven proclaiming God's Will—how shall we hearken to His commandments, and in hearkening to them reach our peace?

Yet surely—most surely—if we listen, may we hear a voice within us, clear as any prophet's message ever sounded, telling us, "Thus saith the Lord." Surely—most surely—if we look for it, may our common life be broken through by many an outshining of glory, wherein God appears to us with beckoning hand to point us to the chosen way. Surely—most surely—if we do not seal our ears against it, may we be thrilled, as we tread our ordinary paths, by a loud trumpet-call that speaks to us of duties forgotten or unknown, and shows us that a Divine Presence has come down to walk with us and guide. Unless God and God's Will and God's command are empty words (better, if they are empty, to drop them from our vocabulary for ever) unless these words are empty of

meaning and truth, then surely God's interest in our life is real, and He adjusts His command and direction to the conditions and requirements of to-day, and as He spoke to His people long ago, so does He speak to His people still, no further from them now than then, as close, as real, as truly God. His voice and witness are with us, near us, in us. His commandments—not the old commandments—commandments ever new—commandments which you and I must gird ourselves up to obey—are proclaimed for us, not as though written upon tables of stone, but more vividly than that, from the temple which He has built for His dwelling within our hearts. And would we find ourselves and possess ourselves in calmness, bring definiteness, purposefulness, into our life, to His proclaiming must we listen, and His proclaiming must we obey. He declares His will, only that we may be at rest. And clear within us, when we bid all other voices hush themselves for a while, through the sudden pause He pleads with us, "Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river."

VIII

A CHRISTIAN CHURCH, BUT CHRIST OUTSIDE

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."—REVELATION iii. 20.

AND those words were uttered (it is the most wonderful thing about them) to an established Christian church. We quote them habitually as though they were the Master's appeal to hearts which have persistently refused to have anything to do with Him; but they are not. They are the Master's call to His own. It almost seems to be an impossible contradiction—a Christian church, and Christ knocking at the door, pleading *outside* for admission, and seeming to plead in vain. But that is it. They had accepted Christ for their Lord, surely, else they could not have been a church of His at all; but He was knocking outside still. Entire strangers to Him they surely could not be, else they could not have been a church of His at all; but there were doors that had not opened to Him yet. It is to His own people, who, because they were

His own, must in a manner have surrendered themselves to Him already, that Christ says He asks for admission to their hearts. It is to His own people, who, because they were His own, must have often heard His voice and responded to it already, that Christ sends His yearning call and entreaty to be let in. And it is to His own people, who, because they were His own, must have known something of what He could do for them and of the riches of His grace already, that Christ gives a promise of what a feast He will make for them if only they will not keep Him waiting any more. A Christian church, but Christ outside.

If such a thing as this can be, it may well drive us into examination of ourselves, that we may see whether we, who have called ourselves, and in all sincerity called ourselves, disciples of Christ, have really let Him come into life's innermost retreats, or whether with us, as with this Laodicean church, there may not be some doors which are unopened still. If it be possible that to His own Christ can still call with an unanswered call, that at hearts which think themselves to be consecrated He may still knock with an unanswered knocking, should we not all ask, with an anxious carefulness and an earnest desire to know ourselves aright, "Lord, is it I?"

Then how can it be? How is it possible that Christ should still be *outside* hearts which are His own? How was it possible for this church of Laodicea? Here is the answer. "I know thy

works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot." Christ is still outside unless the enthusiasm and passion of life is His. The thing He could not bear in His Church then, the thing He cannot bear in His Church to-day, is that passionless sort of religiosity which has no flame or heat in it, which is stirred by no overmastering emotion of love and loyalty to Him, but which accepts Christ because, on a calm and dispassionate review of all the circumstances, it appears—well, the proper thing, the best thing on the whole, to do. And He calls on His Church to be in earnest about something. "I would thou wert cold or hot." Better almost to be cold than to be thus lukewarm. Better almost to have made up your mind to be cold to Christ, to steel yourself against Him, than to let Him come a little way, but to shut that inmost door of love and passion and enthusiasm against Him. "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing"—and out of that self-satisfaction of yours you patronise the Lord. They could not exactly do without Him: in life's outer courts He must be allowed; but the inmost door was closed.

So with us, Christ is outside still, He knocks at an unopened door still, unless in passionate love all our being goes out to Him. And it so seldom does. For it seems no small demand. Not alone that we submit ourselves to His love—that is so often where our conception of Christian discipleship begins and ends. That is an easy thing. But that we concentrate all the enthusiastic affection of our hearts on Him, that we centre all the passionate emotion of our life in

Him, that we not only be ready to let Him do what He can and what He will for us, but burn with consuming desire to do whatever of service we may for Him—that all our thoughts should circle round Him, all our interests be bound up with Him, all our motives be inspired and all our actions be directed by zeal for Him who is our Lord—that is what He demands. Not an easy thing to us, always; and yet, unless we have responded to that demand, He calls to us still, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock."

The innermost door of our nature is the door opening on the love and enthusiasm and passion that are in us. So often we open some of the other doors, some of the outer doors, as it were, to Christ, but not that. We let Him, it may be, into the chamber of Will, that He may come in and assume authority there. That we cannot ourselves order our footsteps aright, we recognise: that He has the title to command our obedience, we know; and so we throw open the door which leads to the place of authority in us, and bid Christ take up His abode there. We will follow His direction: we will do His bidding: He shall say, "Go here," or "Go there," and we will go—"Do this," and we will do it. And is not that all? Are we not fully His now? No. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." What, now that we have flung that door free to Him? Yes, He wants more than that. And then, we often go on to open to Christ the door which leads into that chamber of our nature where we prepare ourselves to *be loved*. We yearn so for tenderness: our hearts cry out so for companionship;

and He gives these things, we know. He will put His arms about us: He will relieve the ache of our loneliness—Oh how quickly we fling that door back and cry to Him, "Come in, Lord, and love us!" And is not that all? When we thus rest in His graciousness, are we not fully His then? No "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." He asks something more still. That inmost chamber from which our love goes out is still closed to Him. Our hearts are not engrossed with Him: our deepest love does not fasten itself upon Him: there is no passion, no fire, in the emotion we feel toward the Christ who has been so warm-hearted toward us. And so He waits outside that door, the door which looks upon the true heat and fire and love of our natures—for so often we allow Him no place there. "But we love Christ," we should all say. Ah yes! but He is not *the* love of all our life. "Be Thou alone my soul's delight, My passion and my love"—we sing it so glibly, and imagine that we mean it. "My passion and my love"—why, that is just the very thing that Christ is *not* to us. He does not master our whole heart. Our whole heart does not pour itself out in adoration and earnest affection before Him. Our discipleship is passionless. We are not in love with Christ. The inmost door is not free to Him. He knocks there vainly still.

Sometimes, indeed, that innermost door, though closed against Him who has best right to demand its opening, is open to other guests. When we take on ourselves the burden of Christian discipleship, so often the main ideals of life, the main aims and

objects of life, are hardly at all changed from what they were. We accept discipleship to Christ in order to make the life we live somewhat more respectable before God, to save it from its extreme sordidness; but in the main make and spirit it is not so much different from what it was. That was what these Laodiceans had done. Their allegiance to Christ had not altered the whole set and current and tendency of their being, as it ought to have done. Their hearts had not, so to say, swung themselves round to lavish all their wealth of love and enthusiasm on Christ. He had come into their life, but had not penetrated to its centre, for they had kept Him away from that. And so life, on the whole, meant to them pretty much what it had meant when they were without Him. And unless, when we give ourselves to Christ, He calls the love and passion of our hearts out in new directions, calls it out toward Himself—unless our whole soul strains after Him, unless our whole heart is consumed with earnest love for Him, flings itself upon Him, lives for Him—ours is the lukewarmness of the Laodicean church, which wounds our Master's heart. We have not opened the innermost door. Condemn ourselves, we all must, when we remember how we have put Christ off with half-love, with imitations of love, with anything rather than the utter, earnest, absorbed devotion of our lives. He has knocked and knocked at our hearts, which have called themselves His own; and we have refused to hear.

So does Christ wait outside lives which belong to Him—outside the inmost door still, though some

doors may have been opened, and call for admission there.

> "Shame on us, Christian brothers,
> His name and sign who bear,
> Oh shame, thrice shame upon us,
> To keep Him standing there."

And if we thus keep the innermost door of our natures shut against our Lord, what makes it worse is that we do so in defiance of His own direct appeal to us, for He knocks. Think of that for a moment. We may seek to excuse ourselves, perhaps, for the half-heartedness of our devotion—we are always so ready to excuse ourselves for anything and everything; and we had better face the fact that for the half-heartedness of our devotion we are left without excuse, because Christ Himself comes and makes it easy for us to give the whole love and passion of our hearts to Him. He knocks.

How are we to blame—do you ask—if the flame of our love to Christ does not burn brightly enough? Surely it is not a thing that can be *compelled*, is it? Can we make ourselves love Him with a love as intense, as passionate, as the love He looks for? Is it our fault if that consuming affection for Him does not rise spontaneously within us? We cannot force it. How is it our blame? Ah! but Christ knocks. He comes Himself to waken in us, to draw out from us, the earnestness of affection for which He asks in His own. Did we but heed His knocking, did we but answer to His appeal, did we but say to Him, as we hear His knock, "Take this heart of mine, and do

with it what Thou wilt," we should love Him as He wants.

It is a high aim, this life of whole-hearted, passionate devotion to Christ? Yes, but if Christianity means anything at all, if the personal ministry of Christ, about which we talk so much, means anything at all, it means that every high aim which Christ sets before us He also makes it possible for us to reach. He wants us to love Him whole-heartedly—but how can I bring back my heart, so far as it wanders, from all the other objects on which it wastes its love, and force it to engross itself with Him? Why, He has sought us out, He stands close to us, He knocks—so that if we only gave up resisting and let ourselves pass beneath His spell, our hearts could do nothing else than burn with the fire of earnest love to Him. He makes it easy for us. Is it true that the Christ touches us to-day and seeks to draw us to Himself? If it be true, then it is easy for us to be earnest in our devotion to Him, because if we look on Him when He touches us, if we let Him do with us what He will when He seeks to draw us, we can't be anything else than wholly earnest in it. Is it true that Christ seeks us out? Then we can be devoted to Him as He wants us to be. And if it be not true, then we had better shut up the churches that stand as representing Christianity, cease talking about the Christian gospel —for then there is no Christianity, no Christian gospel, that has an all-mastering influence and constraint over the human heart. But it is true, be sure of it. Our Master and our Lord comes so near to us, stands just outside that door we so obstinately keep

closed still, and so reveals Himself in all His grace and all His glory that, if we only looked upon the revelation, we should say, "Throw wide the door! And come in, Lord, and dwell there, for all the devotion and ardent love of my nature is for Thee!" And if we have not opened the inmost door, it is because we have refused to look on the Lord who waits and knocks there—and it is our own fault.

Difficult to love Christ as He asks to be loved! Only because we make it difficult for ourselves. If we heeded His knocking and beheld Him as He waits, the difficulty would be to do anything else. Is He not still the chief among ten thousand and the altogether lovely? What heart of us could look on Him and be unmoved? If our hearts are not stirred within us, it is because we have not looked. He reminds us ever of Himself, for He knocks: He tries ever to fix our inconstant hearts upon Himself, for He knocks: He seeks to make the earnest consecration which He demands easy for us, for He knocks. These lofty ranges of Christian devotion are very far from us, we fancy. Well, in a sense they are. We are far enough from living upon them. But they are very near to us, too, for Christ Himself brings them near. And He says to us, "All these great things I ask of you are not so great, after all. This earnestness, this devotion, which I look for from my disciples, is not such a difficult matter after all. For I knock. Only turn to look on Me as I knock, and your whole heart and soul will, without effort, simply because you cannot help it, centre itself on Me." Christ knocks and waits close to us in a grace and glory which our

hearts could not resist. If we do not behold the grace and glory, and our hearts remain cold, it is our own fault.

We can only remain in our half-Christianities, be certain, by keeping Christ back. We can only love Him with a half-love, we can only be devoted to Him with an imperfect devotion, in defiance of His own direct appeal. For He seeks us out, and knocks. If our whole hearts do not go out to Him now, it is our own fault. They could not resist, if we had listened to His knocking. If our consecration be incomplete, we have not only failed of the highest discipleship, but we have deliberately rejected it—for Christ Himself brought it within our reach. Our half-heartedness is our own blame. Oh the pity of it! Oh the black sin and shame of it, too!

And when we have given the whole-hearted devotion of our lives to Christ—when we have opened that innermost door to Him—He makes life to be a feast of joy to us. "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

There lurks within us very often—does there not?—a suspicion that to set all our heart's earnestness and enthusiasm on the service of our discipleship must have a touch of irksomeness in it. How much our Master asks of us! So it seems to us at first. That all our life is to be centred on Him, our whole soul wrapped up in Him, all the devotion that we can wring out of ourselves exacted in His service—well we will try to do it since He demands it; but surely

it must press hardly sometimes. The discipleship in which our entire being is engrossed appears to be rather a hard thing to us. It is a noble life, doubtless, to live so; but it can have only scant gladness for its portion. For joy, surely, we shall have to look elsewhere: we shall not find it, surely, in a service and consecration which so thoroughly absorbs us. And so, when we do try to render to Christ the intense, overmastering love He seeks for, it is half-mournfully we do it. When we do try to open the innermost door, and say to Him, "Come in, Lord, and take all my love for Thine own," we give Him the invitation with some trace of sadness in our tone, as though we were giving up something. As we consecrate ourselves to Him with the earnest consecration He demands from His own, we fancy that we have buried our joy. How unutterably foolish we are! "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." It is just when we waken all the love of our hearts in the service of Christ, not till then, that life's great feast of joy begins. When in the deepest heart and soul of us there is such earnestness of devotion that it really brings our heart to touch the heart of Christ, our soul to touch the soul of Christ, our life to lay itself upon the life of Christ—then it is that, with the whole world shut away, He who has all joy can most fully bestow on us His gifts of joy, and most clearly speak to us His words of joy, and most generously spread for us His feast of joy. We cannot really receive from Him all the rich gladness He has to give until our love is strong enough to

shut us up with Him. We are far wrong when we speak and think as though Christ knocked at our heart's door only to *demand*, to *ask* for something. He knocks because He wants to *give*. Consecration is not only the surrender of ourselves: it is the receiving of Christ, and of all that Christ has to bestow upon the consecrated ones. Not till the door is flung back can our Master make the perfect feast for us: He wants it opened in order that in the secret places of our nature He may minister to us: to the love of our hearts, when it is perfect as our poor hearts can make it, He answers with His own more perfect love. "I will come in and sup with him, and he with me." The feast will begin.

"But our discipleship has some irksomeness already," you say. "Our half-devotion is a strain sometimes. Shall we not find the strain greater still, with a more absorbing devotion?" Ah yes, our discipleship has some irksomeness, just because it is only a half-discipleship. It is always so. We never get the joy of anything till it fully possesses us. Take up what pursuit you like, it will have little else than hardship and ugliness for you unless you are really in earnest about it and put your soul into it. There is no joy worth having that is to be got cheaply. Give yourself to anything half-heartedly, and you see the difficulties of it, and magnify the difficulties of it, and are held back by the difficulties of it. But throw yourself into it, open the door so that the ardour and earnestness of your nature may come out upon it, and the difficulties are lightened, and disappear at last. So the Christian life, our

discipleship to our Lord, is difficult to us because we only half live the Christian life and only partially follow Him whose disciples we profess to be. If we were possessed by Christ, if we were possessed of Christ, the difficulties and hardships and irksomenesses of our Christian service would dwindle down and be forgotten. Our hearts would have no room for them, were our hearts full of the passion for our Lord. When the innermost door is opened, the Christ Himself comes in, and by His coming casts the difficulties out. To make our Christian life easier, to rob it of its irksomeness and restraint, to baptize it with its full baptism of joy, fling the door wide!

Oh what we miss by our half-hearted discipleship! Oh what we miss! Christ stands and knocks at that innermost door of our natures through which our love and passion should go out to Him, and He wants it opened at His knock. But we also stand outside doors which open upon the deepest blessedness and joy of the spiritual life, and we want them opened to us, do we not? Those doors will never open to our knocking unless we open the door at which Christ knocks to His. No perfect joy, no entire blessedness, until we let Him in to possess all our love. Shall we not open that inmost door of our hearts, and bid Him enter, lest, as we stand and knock at the inmost doors of Christian joy and blessing, we find that they too are shut?

IX

SELF-FINDING THROUGH SELF-SUBJECTION

"For I have given you an example."—JOHN xiii. 15.

AN ambition which appears to be more or less deeply rooted in the mind of everybody is the ambition to do what no one else has ever done before. The worship of originality is carried to extremes. What people admire in others is the bold striking out along new lines, even in things wherein it is unquestionably better to keep to the old lines than to start forth upon new. What people desire for themselves is to be delivered from the reproach of doing what those who have gone before have done, and to establish a fresh precedent for those who shall come after. In fact, it would almost seem that if a man can only succeed in breaking the record in something or other, he is prepared thereafter to die happy, feeling that he has not wholly lived in vain. Perhaps there is no element in our life more marked just now than this ambition to outdistance others; and, while properly controlled and kept in check, it has without doubt its own place and its own work. But carried to excess, as it so

often is, it is fruitful of dispositions and qualities that add nothing to the fairness of human character or to the beauty of human life.

The spirit of religion is a spirit precisely the opposite of this. The spirit of the Christian religion is the spirit which is content to rule and control life by one example of perpetual authority, accepting that example as the final revelation of what life ought to be. If one were asked to point out some clear difference between life in the Christian spirit and life outside the Christian spirit, one could point to this as a difference most marked—that he who lives outside the spirit of Christian discipleship seeks to map out his course for himself, seeks, as it were, to explore new countries and hitherto undiscovered lands ; while he who lives within the spirit of Christian discipleship humbles himself to take his principles and methods of life as they are given to him by his Master, and is content to walk in the old paths, trusting, yea, rather knowing, that the old paths lead at last to those "shining table-lands whereof our God Himself is sun and moon."

If we be really Christ's, then we seek, not to find out new lines of life for ourselves, but to hold ourselves in faithfulness upon the lines laid down. "I have given you an example."

Perhaps, in spite of our frequent repetition of the phrase, "the imitation of Christ"—perhaps it may be that we have not realised how much is involved in it. We need to remind ourselves, ever and again, how closely the demand for Christly imitation should press

upon us, how all-embracing Christ would have His grip upon our lives to be.

When we surrender our lives to Christ, His first requirement of us is that we live altogether on lines He has laid down; and we need to recognise that requirement of His afresh, and to lay the burden of it once more upon our hearts. For it is not the first, the natural, impulse of the human heart so to live—to limit itself, to restrain itself within prescribed boundaries, to have its method of life found for it instead of finding its method of life for itself. Even when we have owned Christ's sovereignty, we do not always understand how entire is the servitude into which He sends us, or how absolute is the authority, and how closely-pressing, with which He says to us, "I have given you an example. The course of your life is ordained for you, and by that you must live." The first impulse, the first desire, of human nature is to find itself, to make the most of itself and of its own powers. There are things which I feel I can do, and I want to be inspired with more strength to do them, not to be commanded to give up the doing of them and to do these other things instead. I have felt capabilities within me, faintly stirring, promising that if only they can find scope I shall make something great and worthy out of my life; and I want a Lord and Master who will enable me to work out these capabilities of mine, not one who will make me restrain them and keep them down. What we think we need is not to be restrained, but to be set free—not to be ordered upon prescribed lines of life, but empowered to realise the possibilities of life that are

in us already—not to be made slaves to the example of another, but inspired and strengthened to make the most of ourselves. And we come to Christ very often—do we not?—having as our first thought about Him that He will help us to do this. We have been so little—by His inspiration He will enable us to be great. Our powers and capabilities have been so checked and hindered and kept back—by His inspiration He will so enlarge life for us that these things will have free course. And whereas all our life's activities have been so feeble, all our life's movements so slow, by His inspiration He will make life full and strong and free. Will He not do these things? Yes, He will do them; but that is not His first dealing with us. First of all comes this, "I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done." We come to Him, wanting to do so many things, asking Him to help and inspire us in the doing of them: we want to accomplish this, and to complete that, to finish this great task so that we may have something worth showing for our life: "Lord, help us in all these things." And He answers, "Nay, but here are the ways and methods of life appointed for you, the ways and methods I have myself prescribed. Never mind about the great tasks, the great capabilities. I have given you an example. Bind yourself down to that. Seek, not first and foremost to find yourself, but to lose yourself in my example and command." These disciples had dreamt their dreams, their dreams of what their following of Christ would bring to them. Was He not to be an all-powerful Lord and King? Had they not looked

forward to a time when they themselves should be great and powerful because He should have asserted His greatness and taken to Himself His power? But from those dreams Christ calls them away: their discipleship to Him meant something smaller and humbler than that; and He washes the disciples' feet, and says to them, "I have given you an example. *This*, not those glorious dreams of yours, is what your following of Me means. Bring yourselves down to that." And so Christ's first requirement from all of us is that we limit ourselves, restrain ourselves, by the example His spirit sets before us. We are ready to be inspired by Christ, to be made strong and great and successful by Christ—are we ready to be chained down to the ways and methods of life He appoints? Without that, we cannot be His disciples. We are willing that Christ should help us to find ourselves, to make the most of ourselves—are we willing to surrender all thought of self, and of what self may be and do, and to let Him mark out all our being and doing for us? Without that, we cannot be His disciples. The Christ is Inspirer and Strengthener and Helper indeed; but, as we come to Him, He makes a *claim* on us to which we must listen and submit before He will be any of these things. "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am." Master and Lord first—and first of all we must recognise Him so. In authority He marks out our life for us. Not what we think we can do, but what He wants us to do, is the first thought. He has given us an example. Before everything else, He is to *rule* our life.

For Christ knows that only by thus setting us within limits and under restraints, that only thus can we ever really make anything out of life at all, that only thus can it ever become beautiful and fair. We think that we can do so much, such great things: we feel powers and capabilities stirring within us which point to the accomplishment of a great deal; but what a muddle we should make out of it all had we no authority to guide and rule us! In all things the best results are reached by those who have most entirely submitted themselves to control. There is a great promise for our life, and Christ will at last make the promise come true: there are great possibilities for our life, and Christ will at last see to it that they are realised; but life's promise must fail and life's possibilities come to nought unless we have submitted ourselves to the restraints and limitations which Christ imposes. Promise and possibility are great indeed; but better shut them out for a while, perhaps, and just give ourselves to directing our life along the lines His spirit reveals.

We ought to take up our discipleship afresh to-day, recognising afresh the supreme importance of this self-discipline and self-restraint. "I have given you an example." He has set lines and limits for us, and our first task should be to make our life conform to them. We have so often seemed to think, Can I do this, can I go here or there, without disobedience? We have almost sought to see how far we could go without denying our allegiance. Christ has been to us just one who called us back when we were going too far, not one who Himself

marked out all our life's course for us. No wonder our life has grown deformed and ugly. And, if we want to be true to all the demands of our discipleship, we must behold Him standing over our life and hear Him claim that all our life shall be under His positive command, that we keep ourselves wholly to the ways He marks out. "I have given you an example." To all His followers that is His first word.

And He marks out our life's course for us—how? How has He given an example? Where shall we look for it? I have said that when we surrender our lives to Christ, His first requirement of us is that we live altogether on lines He lays down: next, we need to impress upon our hearts that He lays them down for us, not once for all, but day by day and hour by hour, so that, if day by day and hour by hour we seek to be faithful to Him, we can make no mistake. "I have given you an example"—He said that long ago; but He says it again and again to us to-day: again and again to us to-day is the example freshly given.

The *example* freshly given to-day? Yes: I have not used the wrong word. I do not mean that Christ comes to us to-day and points us back to His life of nineteen hundred years ago, and says to us, "Live by that—I have given you an example there." He would have but small control over us if that were all. But I mean that our Master keeps pace with us as our life goes on: I mean that they who care to see Him can always raise their eyes out of the circumstances of their present-day existence and behold Him living

their life, and hear Him say, "This is my way of doing it—I give you the example now." And that is the great miracle our Lord is ever doing for us: this is Christ's power, the power by which He ever seeks to keep our life right. He can always make Himself, His example, present to us: He makes Himself, His spirit, so living to us that we always know just what He would do; and, be our circumstances, our temptations, our life's problems, what they may, we can always seem to see, if we will, the Christ Himself standing in the midst of just those circumstances, those temptations, those problems, and can know how He would face them. The heart that really seeks His guidance can ever behold Him going before upon the way: we can look for Him now and see Him living our life now; and He helps us, not because He has once been in our world and shown the pattern of a perfect life in it, but because He is in our world to-day and shows to watching eyes and obedient hearts the pattern of a perfect life still. Are we faced by some doubtful action, and uncertain whether it be worthy the doing or not? But, if we can only shake ourselves free for a moment from all other thoughts, and just, in silence and readiness to obey, look on the Lord, our uncertainty disappears. Will He do it? Then He has given us an example. Will He not do it? Then He has given us an example. Always, He faces the circumstances of our life with us—Himself goes before us and so marks out the course.

And it is in this that the imitation of Christ, rightly understood, is so different, so utterly different, from all

other imitations. "The imitation of Christ" is a phrase often on the lips of those who have rejected almost the whole of Christian thought, who care little or nothing for what to us is the essence of the Christian gospel. But they mean by it just this, and nothing more—that Christ, when He lived His human life and walked in the sight of men upon this earth of ours, revealed many graces of character by the copying of which we may make our life fairer, did many deeds by the repetition of which our life may gain in nobleness and worth. And that is all. But if the imitation of Christ means no more than that, then He simply takes rank with other great ones who have given examples to the world—stands perhaps (as by practically universal consent He does stand) somewhat higher than the rest, offers perhaps a loftier ideal than most, but nevertheless has done only what others have done for mankind. And all are ready to imitate Christ in that sense. But that is not the imitation required in a true Christian discipleship. Oh, the poorness of that imitation beside the imitation He asks of us if He is really to be our Lord! It is not that out of His human life certain great principles emerge by which we are to guide ourselves: great principles have emerged from other lives than His: if He be truly Son of Man and Son of God to us, there must be more than that! Christ does not govern our lives by general principles, be the principles never so inspiring and great. Others do that. The great heroes of the human race do that. The prophets, the martyrs, the saints, do that. But Christ comes into our life's pathway now, and we can see Him giving His

example and asserting His authority and commanding us to follow now. It is not that He has lived a life something like ours, but that He lives out our actual life, if only we will have eyes to see Him, shows us how it ought to be lived. We are to order our ways, not by the example He gave, but by the example He is ever freshly giving. In our life's common paths we find Him, if we seek: in our life's common paths we hear Him say, if we only listen, "I am giving you an example, that ye should do as I have done."

I said that many who care little or nothing for the Christian gospel are willing to imitate Christ as they imitate other great and noble lives, copying the graces of His character, repeating the beauty of His deeds. Yet, if one thinks of it, what, beyond that, has the phrase "the imitation of Christ" meant to many of us who have, without limit or reserve, called ourselves His disciples? We have looked back to the example He gave, but have forgotten to look up for the example He gives: we, too, have supposed that to imitate Him was just to be gracious as He was gracious, and loving as He was loving, and truthful as He was truthful, and pure as He was pure, to say so far as we can the words He said, to do so far as we can the things He did. A government of our life by the general principles of Christ's life—that is what we have taken it to be. We have looked back, I say—and oh how the time and the distance have seemed to make the vision of that life grow dim, and the effort to imitate it unreal! How can we follow His example—we amid the din and

bustle of our modern life and our complex civilisation? His life was on totally different planes, and it is such years and years behind us and was lived such miles and miles away! No, we cannot really imitate Him if to imitate Him means the copying of what He was—as it were writing the record of His human life over again. But it does not mean that. Take a new conception of your relationship to your Master and your Lord. Look for Him to show you His example now. Behold Him living your life, for He does live it within your sight, going step by step with you, passing from word to word and from deed to deed with you, and thus giving the example by which your words and deeds may be kept right. In our life's common ways and our life's ordinary circumstances He walks with us to-day. He did not manifest Himself once for all, and does not say, "Be as I was." He manifests Himself now, and says, "Be as I am." So He binds us by chains which every moment He newly forges. So does He seek to keep our life true—by the magnetism and authority of the revelation He gives to us to-day.

Into that servitude does He command us to go. Yet I cannot leave the matter there. Christ's first word to those who would be His disciples is always "I have given you an example. Follow thou Me." But it is not the last word. Servitude, following, first of all—but some word must surely be said of the joy and glory of the servitude. For if our Master commands us first to give up thinking about what we can do, about what we would like to do,

about our dreams, about making the most of ourselves, and to be content simply with obedience and following—still we find at last that by our obedience and following we have after all fulfilled the possibilities which for a while we put out of sight, and have attained far more than in our most wonderful dreams we hoped to attain, and have made the most of ourselves, of our life, after all.

Again, it is one of Christ's most wonderful powers. By commanding us to lose ourselves, He enables us to find ourselves. "Surrender your own thoughts of what you want to do with your life. I have given you an example—bind yourself down to that." Yes, but by binding ourselves down to that we make a great deal, make everything, out of our life. "Never mind about the great tasks, the great capabilities, the glorious dreams. I have given you an example—bind yourself down to that." Yes, but by binding ourselves down to that we accomplish the tasks and use the capabilities and realise the glorious dreams, and more than the most glorious dreams. True it is that he who loseth his life in utter servitude and obedience to Him who gives an example—he, in his servitude and obedience, will find his life again, and find it made great and free.

Be sure (and we may encourage ourselves with this when to follow the "example" moment by moment grows hard and wearisome, as to our weakness it sometimes will) be sure that in every act of obedience we are training ourselves for the greatest and best. Every time our Master gives us the example and we in loyalty follow it, we have done

far more than we understand or know. Have we not in some measure proved it for ourselves? We have come to Christ seeking for strength to carry out some purpose of ours which we thought to be worthy, and He has said to us, "No, leave that, and obey Me in *this*." And we have obeyed, perhaps in half-reluctance and with pain at our heart because our cherished purpose had to be set aside. But we have found, when our obedience has been rendered, that we have grown strong after all, and have done far more than we had hoped to do. He has but made us renounce our hope that by our obedience it might be the more fully realised at last. Following, obedience, never means loss. It cannot mean loss, for our Master loves us too well. When we want to take *this* road to what we think will be life's victory and greatness, Christ comes and bids us, "No, not that way, but this. Restrain yourself, follow My leading, My example—take this path which looks less inviting and more shadowed." And lo! the shadowed path proves the shortest path to life's true victory and life's true greatness after all; and by our sacrifice and obedience we win.

He makes us lose ourselves in servitude, only that we may become more truly free. He calls us from our dreams of what we want to be and to do, only that He may make us be something better and do something better than we have dreamt. He sets His yoke upon us, only that we may enter into rest. He gives us an example, and binds us down to that, only that by the closeness of our servitude our souls may expand. And so the one thing on which we need to

set our hearts to-day, would we really make the most of ourselves and have our life attain to the highest at last, is this—to have our Lord, to-day and all days, appear to us upon the common paths of life, and to have Him say to us, "I have given you an example, and give it still, that ye should do as I have done."

It is the secret of our greatness. Servants, that we may be free. Slaves that we may be crowned.

X

BEGINNING WELL AND FAILING AFTERWARDS

"But if any man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble; each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire."—1 CORINTHIANS iii. 12–15.

THE one outstanding thought in these verses is that it is possible to begin rightly and then to fail afterwards. Paul has just told the Corinthians that the basis of all that is worthy in life is Jesus Christ. "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." And they had recognised and understood that (so the apostle appears to imply), only they must be reminded that there is something more even than that. Even the laying of that right foundation does not of itself ensure perfection: you may have the right foundation and yet build upon it wrongly. "Gold, silver, costly stones"—these things stand as the symbols of

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a high and worthy spiritual life. "Wood, hay, stubble" — these stand fittingly as symbols to represent the elements of a low spiritual life. And we may build—Paul wishes to warn his readers with emphasis—we may build, even after we have seen to it that our life's foundation is right, with the baser materials. Paul saw that the members of the Corinthian church, with their disputations and rivalries and unworthy strivings for superiority, were far from being what they ought to be, and he tells them, "Ah! you have taken the wood and the hay and the stubble into your hands for your building, instead of the gold and the silver and the costly stones. You may have the right foundation, but the house of life and character you are rearing up on it is not fair as it should be. You began well, but failure is come."

Note the fact, then, first, the fact which Paul is seeking to emphasise. There is a possibility of beginning well and of failing afterwards. And we need to keep the solemn thought before us, to warn us and to spur us on—the thought that some coming short of the high spiritual destiny which it might have reached is possible, even for the soul which has recognised Jesus Christ as the true foundation of a true life. And there is sometimes danger of forgetting it. We concentrate the emphasis of thought so much upon the beginning. Back in that moment when we took the decision to live for God, back in that hour when the Christ won us—*that*, it seems to us, was surely the time of supreme crisis when our spiritual

fate was fixed for ever! That was the time when we laid the foundation; but there remains still the question, How are we going to build? We cannot make one quick surrender of ourselves to God, and then, lying passive in His hands, cast all the question of our spiritual destiny from our minds as though we had done with it, and as though it could not fail to be solved, and solved rightly, for us. God never gives us a message like this, "You have only to see that the beginning is right, and then you may fold your hands." Rather does He tell us that day by day we—we who are His children—are growing to be more truly His children, and so fitting ourselves to be admitted to the inmost circle of His own at last, or else we are narrowing our hearts and starving our souls and remaining cramped and dwarfed and unenriched, so that, though we be His children, we can only be His children afar off. We shall enter our kingdom; but it may be, if we have been heedless, that we shall come to it with lame, feeble, halting steps, not with the firm foot-fall of those who know that their place is secure. We shall reach our heaven; but it may be, if we have been heedless, that its bliss will not be so perfect nor its glory so surpassing, as if we had always watched and prayed. We may begin well, and partially fail afterwards. We have our own part to play in the building up of character, and as we do our part or leave it undone shall be our gain or our loss. Be careful how you build.

And this possibility of partial failure exists (this is the important thing to remember) though the underlying purpose of our life is all the time right. These

Corinthians really had the right foundation, the apostle implies, but the building was wrong. We may be putting forth spiritual activity, giving ourselves in a manner to spiritual effort; and it may be doing little for us. The accepted purpose of our hearts may be spiritual, and yet, unless we guard ourselves, we may more or less completely fail to realise it. We may desire and intend to build up a worthy house of life on the right foundation, and yet we may let in the wood and hay and stubble, and so spoil its fairness. Sometimes, in a moment of self-revelation, when we see ourselves as we really are and take account of our position, as we look back upon what we have been and done, the bitter consciousness comes upon us that while we have often thought about holy things, and spoken much of holy things, and in a manner given ourselves to the pursuit of holy things, that yet it has not done very much for us. It has not told on us; it seems to have been so much effort wasted. Too often we have to confess that, with all our thought and toil directed upon sacred ends, we have spent our strength for nought, and our labour for that which satisfieth not: our spirits have striven and our hearts have been anxious, and yet it appears vain: we have obtained, with futile toil, some character which is no copy of a God-given pattern, but deformed, ugly, worthless: we have built with wood and hay and stubble a building which can only be swept down again, since it can never face the testing judgment-fires.

So, spite of our true foundation, do we often

build wrongly. Now see how this partial failure comes, according to the apostle's metaphor. It comes from settling down into something of coarseness: the builder forsakes the gold and silver and costly stones, the more precious and refined materials, and uses the wood and hay and stubble, the coarser and commoner things. And so we spoil the fair beauty of the spiritual life we build by failing to preserve its fineness, by lowering of the spiritual tone, by letting the character take colour from its surroundings, by allowing the materials that lie nearest to hand, so to say—the outward and earthly—to have too great a place in our building. So accessible are we to all that can influence us from the side of what is low, that it comes in and makes part of our life before we know it, in some moment of carelessness. The world touches us, and, though we may be unconscious of the fact, it has by its touch done something to harm and lower us. Unless we exercise constantly an earnest watchfulness and an unremitting care, we may awake some day to find that, although we do love God still, it is with a love out of which the old consuming passion has departed—that, although we do step heavenward still, it is without the glad buoyancy in which we used to tread the upward way—that, although we do live a life of service to the right still, it is a service from which there has faded the thrill and glory our service once possessed. Our spiritual life is a coarser thing. The wood and hay and stubble have got into the building. Our souls have lost their fineness. "How is the gold become dim! how is the most pure gold changed!"

And in two ways, chiefly, does this coarsening of the soul find its entrance. We lose the fineness and fairness from our spiritual life because we insensibly lower our standards of conduct, and because we insensibly let conscience lose its keen sensitiveness and grow dull. We lower our standards of conduct from the high level we at first sought to attain, and so we build the wood and hay and stubble into our life. At first it seems so easy a thing to regulate our activities rightly. We have but to imitate the Christ, we say, and we set ourselves with ardour to do it. Let us but lay our life, as it were, close alongside the Christ's, and transfer one grace after another from His life to ours—surely, living so, we shall be kept right! But we go out into the world and into the rush and press of life's duties and engagements, and the complexity of it all comes to grip us and to hold us down; and we seem to be carried so far away from our model that we lose sight and touch of Him. And then, in the weakness and weariness and perplexity of our spirits, something whispers that it is no use trying to keep our life up to too high a level. "Your lofty ideas and your high aspirations will not work in this commonplace world"—so some devil is always at hand to tell us. Under the pressure of convention and the stress of life our high standards of conduct go down and down and down, and, except for an occasional thought of regret, they are set aside and forgotten. It is the building with wood and hay and stubble. It is the coarsening of the soul.

And then we let the coarser materials come in in that we let conscience lose its sensitiveness and grow

dull. Here again we begin well. At first Christ stands over us in power, and every evil influence shrinks back ashamed before Him. The quick "Get thee behind me, Satan," rises instinctively to our lips when any allurement to wrong presents itself; and in the new ardour of our discipleship sin has lost its power to win us. But it is difficult to preserve this freshness of the conscience: the clear vision of the Christ, which used by its wondrous influence and its magnetic charm to control us and to keep us right, does not stand before us in its old glory; and, again under the pressure of convention and the rush and stress of life, the inner voices do not speak as they did. Who of us has not found it so? Have we not sometimes discovered that we walk among the many calling voices and conflicting authorities of the world, and that from out of the inmost deeps of our nature there comes no conscience-cry with sufficient warning clearness to say, "This is the way! Walk ye in it!"? We have allowed the world to dull the keen sensitiveness of our hearts; and so, unguided and drifting, we go wrong. Again, it is the building with wood and hay and stubble. It is the coarsening of the soul.

Thus we let the baser materials in. We lower our standards of conduct: we lose the sharp sensitiveness of conscience. And the lower standard of conduct helps to dull the conscience more, and the dulled conscience still further drags down the standard of conduct, and slowly the whole character comes to be a lower, meaner thing. The beauty of a life built up with gold and silver and costly stones is not ours.

We are and do so little that is worthy to be stamped immortal, so little that can bear the searching gaze and the testing fires of God.

Then the apostle goes on to speak of a coming test which shall either condemn our life's workmanship, or mark it as enduring. "Each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is." And the work of some, he says, is to abide: the work of others is to be burned.

Sooner or later the method of our building must become apparent: sooner or later we must come to some experience which requires a fully equipped character to meet it. Even here there may come some spiritual crisis which we cannot face and triumph over because we have built wrongly: even here we may pay the penalty for heedlessness in a bitter consciousness that our souls are not rich as they might have been, that they have lost something which eternity itself cannot restore. And if not here, then the test must come to us when the eternal moral realities and the righteousness of God touch us close in other worlds than this. Face to face with the God who is the central sun of purity and the glory of whose holiness makes Him to be a consuming fire, the soul shall be humbled as it sees its past building found wanting and brought down, or shall be touched with highest joy to know that its building has not been wholly in vain.

But according to the apostle we may, when the

time of testing and final judgment comes, know disappointment and loss, and yet be saved "so as through fire." I am not going into any very detailed interpretation of the words: I do not claim to know precisely what they do mean or what Paul had in his mind when he wrote them. But I see, at any rate, this solemn and warning truth in them—that we may be set down in the kingdom of God at last at the beginning of spiritual growth, not in *fulness* of life—that God may have to set us right back to the commencement again, because we have not learnt His lessons nor used our time of training well—that as He leads us on from grace to grace and from glory to glory we may, through our past carelessness and sloth, be for evermore a step behind. To be "saved so as through fire" may mean to go back, in sorrowful confession that we have built with wood and hay and stubble a building not divine enough to stand for ever in the sight of God, to go back to the beginning of our spiritual pupilage once more, with its lessons to learn again and its battles to fight anew with sterner purpose and nobler resolve.

We do not think of it as we ought. I believe—and it is enough surely to rouse us in our sluggishness to think of it—that every moment we are doing something to brighten or to darken the glory of the heaven to which we go. I believe—and it is enough surely to make us question our dead hearts whether it shall be so for us—that to some of us God will have to say (and though He say it in regret and pity, the hearing of it must none the less shame us utterly),

"You are my children indeed, and shall not stand outside the gates; but where are the gold and silver and costly stones that should have added lustre to your house of life? You have built with wood and hay and stubble; fitted yourselves only for the lowest, lowest place." Remember it. "Each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it."

But to stop there would be to leave the message incomplete. How shall we secure ourselves against the building wrongly? How preserve our souls from the coarseness that so quickly creeps in? And I answer thus. Just as when we wanted to lay the right foundation of our spiritual experience, we did it by beholding Christ as a living reality before us, so we keep our character-building true, can only keep it true, by beholding Christ as a living reality always before us! We want to come back to the first simplicities of the Christian life. We once heard the Christ speak, and by His speaking He called us to Himself and enabled us rightly to begin: we want to hear Him speak every moment still, and by His speaking He will enable us rightly to continue and to end. We came to Him once and He redeemed us and enabled us rightly to begin: we want to come to Him every moment still, and every moment He will redeem us from the unworthy to the true, and so enable us rightly to continue and to end. What served at the beginning serves, and cannot fail to serve, to the end. If the living Christ only stand by to direct the building for

us, the wood and hay and stubble will never find place. Only I repeat the phrase "the living Christ," for the whole secret lies there. We are told on all hands just now (and it is true—I at least have no quarrel with it) that in order to get at the real meaning of Christ's messages to the world and Christ's teaching to those who follow Him, we must get back to the living Christ, that is, forget what men have been saying about Him, forget how they have been interpreting His words, and transport ourselves in imagination back across the centuries to stand before the Christ Himself and to hear Him and Him alone. And to keep our character-building right, to secure ourselves against beginning well and failing afterwards, we want to get back, too, to the living Christ—only *not* in the sense of carrying ourselves back in imagination across the years to Him! We have done far too much of that already, and there is but little power in it to constrain us to be true! The Christ has always been far too much a Figure standing back in the past, whom we have had to look upon far—so far—away. We want to get back to the living Christ in the sense that *here* and *to-day* there shall stand with us, in all His power and grace, the Christ who teaches now, and redeems now, and keeps us true by His gracious compulsions now! Not alone what Christ *was* and *did*, but what Christ *is* and *does*, is our safeguard. And so by this real and living Christ shall we most assuredly be preserved from losing the fineness of our spiritual life, from using the wood and hay and stubble in the spiritual house we build. The coarseness of soul

comes in, I said, because we little by little lower the standard of our daily activities and conduct; but if the Christ who lives now stand by us, then amid all the perplexities of our way He will moment by moment point out the only path. When we are tempted to turn this way or that, we have not to think back, as it were, to Him, and puzzle our poor thought as to how the Christ we seek to imitate would have acted here—but only to cast one supplicating glance to the living, present Christ beside us, and at once the inspiration flashes forth to guide. The coarseness of soul comes in, I said, because we little by little let conscience lose the keen edge of its sensitiveness; but if the Christ who lives now stand by us, then from Him will come moment by moment the warning voices, the clear calls, that bid us deny the evil and pursue the good. And so what we need to do is just to kneel in simplicity before Him as we knelt when we came to Him first: if our Christ be, not one who has lived and done something for us, but one who lives for us and works for us now, then our souls shall keep the first freshness of their sacred life undiminished, and the gold of our faithfulness and obedience shall never wax dim. O have no years between! Close by us let the Christ be, and so, if ever our hands reach out to the wood and hay and stubble as though about to build the baser materials into life, He will restrain us and speak, "Nay, rather, build with these worthier elements a character which under God's searching tests may stand firm and endure." Against the wrong building we are guarded by the influence and power, not of a far-off Christ

who lived, but of a Christ who lives, lives for us and with us now.

Then watch and pray beside Him. That is the lesson of it all. Watch and pray, lest the soul grow coarser. Watch and pray, lest the baser materials come in. Watch and pray. Do not let us fail of our destiny or spoil our perfect joy. For who can tell but that some black shadows may sweep even over our path on high, as we look up and see our brethren who have reached the loftier levels, and know that, but for past carelessness and stolen hours of ease, we too might be there? O heed the building! Guard the rising life in the heart! Beware lest the memory of ideals unreached, of spiritualities unclaimed, of aspirations lightly resigned, of a Christliness you did not strive to win, should cross at last even the gladness of your heaven. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

XI

THE CONTRAST OF SPEECH AND DEED

"Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."—JOHN vi. 68.

"Then all the disciples left him, and fled."—MATTHEW xxvi. 56.

NOTHING could be more emphatic than the assertion of belief in Christ contained in the first verse. Yet nothing could be more emphatic, either, than the proof of disbelief in Christ seemingly afforded by the second. If He had the words of eternal life, and if they were sure of that, it seems passing strange that they should give Him up so soon. For nothing had happened between the time of the acknowledgment of faith in Christ by Peter as the spokesman of the twelve and the time of the cowardly desertion of Christ by the twelve—nothing had happened in the interval for which the twelve should not have been prepared. True, the hatred of those in ecclesiastical high place against Christ had come to a head; but that it existed His disciples had known long ago; and they might surely have anticipated that soon or late it would take courage to do its worst. One would have supposed that by meditation upon the

crisis which at some time or other was certain to present itself, by frequent speech about it, by constant fanning of the fire of faithfulness in their hearts, they would make themselves ready to face it bravely when it came. One is not quite prepared for the wretched show they made when the moment of their testing arrived. The Christ had the words of eternal life, they knew: surely they would suffer a little and dare a little for that? Firm and clear is the declaration the twelve make by Peter's mouth of their conviction that Christ has the secret of the highest blessing—"to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." It rings like the utterance of true men; and here in this other verse they are running like sheep at the first sign of danger. Their assurance that Christ had the words of eternal life was not enough—though one would have expected it to be enough—to keep them at His side.

So they ran away from what they knew all the time to be their highest good. That is what it comes to. When they had been faithless, they could not plead in their defence that they were ignorant of Christ's greatness and Christ's power: their own confession was behind to make that defence impossible. They knew Christ: they had caught a glimpse of the divine halo which circled His brow: it was no unknown fact to them that He had the words of heaven upon His lips, that He bore heaven in His heart. They knew all that, but they left Him and fled.

In things moral and spiritual men are doing pre-

cisely the same thing to-day They run from that which—so far as words go—is honoured as the best. Men have no hesitation in asserting of certain things that they are the highest and the best: they have no hesitation, either, in shelving those same things when circumstances seem to make it politic so to do. And both outside and inside the Christian Church it is equally the case. There is little doubt and little question as to what is the best thing in all the world; but as unanimously as people make acknowledgment of the supremacy of goodness at one moment, just as unanimously do they turn their backs on goodness at another. There is no real serious difference of opinion as to the supreme claims of righteousness: a man would be thought a curiosity if he deliberately maintained that evil is in itself a more valuable thing for the world than goodness; and we should look with amused suspicion as to his sanity on any one who said that to break the ten commandments is a better philosophy of life than to keep them. Men may repudiate *religions*, but they do not repudiate *religion*, let the precise meaning they attach to the term be what it may. My reading or your reading of religion they may reject; or they may so empty the word of significance that, to us, what is left hardly appears worth calling religion at all. But as to the broad fact that goodness is in itself a better thing for the world than sin, uprightness a better thing for the world than dishonesty, virtue a better thing for the world than its opposite—as to that, at least, the verdict of all sane people is the same.

One may go further than that. Even so far as

regards Christianity, I suppose that all or most would admit that to rule life in the spirit of Christ would be gain. In some sense all would echo the saying of Peter, "Thou hast the words of eternal life." That on many of life's problems Christ spoke the last and highest words, that His direct teachings tend to make human life gracious and fair, that His influence over the minds of men to-day relieves human life of harshness and touches it with colours of beauty and light—who questions these things? Could we obtain from all the inhabitants of our world a declaration of their opinion as to whether of all teachers and guides of the human race Christ be not the highest, surpassing all others as the sun's noon-day brilliance surpasses a rush-light's flickering flame, we may be sure that if there were one or two scattered dissentient voices, they would be drowned in the great chorus, and the world's verdict would exalt Him to the loftiest place with acclaim. *My* Christianity or *your* Christianity may be spurned, but before Christ Himself the multitudes go down with bowed head and bended knee.

Then surely, if men think so highly of goodness, of Christly ideals of life, they will cling to them, will they not? If these things are worthy of so much honour, they must be worthy, too, of a little sacrifice now and again—of sacrifice to the uttermost, rather—since they are the greatest things in all the world? Yet men do not cling to them. Goodness may be best, but it has no such command over human life as one would expect the best things to have: Christ may be First and Highest, but none the less do men

forsake Him and flee. If one were not so sadly accustomed to it, it would surely appear one of the most extraordinary things in all the world—a moral miracle, indeed—the contrast between the great things people say of goodness and of Christ, and the little things they do for goodness and for Christ. I said before that both outside and inside the Christian Church the case is so. Outside, an acknowledgment, perfectly sincere, that goodness is the one thing before all other things worth having—and then a subordination of goodness to all other things, as though it stood last instead of first in the scale. Goodness is chief, but men will not identify their lives with it. And inside—inside the Church—an acknowledgment again, and again perfectly sincere, that in the Christ all claims to our obedience are vested, that by His constant controlling of it life grows great, that the throne of the universe is His—and then a divorce of much of our life from Him, as though there were parts of it with which He can have nothing to do, or as though we could dally with Him when it pleases us, and could wave Him back for a while when other considerations come in. Christ is chief, but we will not identify our lives with Him. Goodness and Christ the first and best things—and, having paid them the compliment of confessing that they are first and best, we pass on. We pile on and heap up the phrases wherein we yield them highest honour; and then comes the quick forsaking of them by which we make all our phrases about them appear a mockery, and deprive them of the honour we have rendered them a moment before. We know where our highest

good is, and we forsake it. "Thou hast the words of eternal life"—but we leave Him, and flee.

Understand the seriousness of it. I am not speaking now of the momentary forgetfulness, the unexpected weakness of will, which so often drags us into sin. But I mean that in our customary scheme of life, there are large tracts wherein the idea of goodness and Christ finds no place. For these parts of our life, so to say, we set goodness and Christ aside. They are not in order there. For not one of us is the real control of good or Christly ideals over us proportioned to our words about them. By what we say about them, they should be our all in all; and they are not that.

What can be the reason of it? How is it that men and women turn so quickly away from the goodness whose supremacy they acknowledge?

When Peter said to Jesus, for himself and for the other disciples, "Thou hast the words of eternal life," he was simply giving utterance to a sort of intellectual conviction that had no deep moral life or passionate moral experience behind it. Christ had been uttering one of His most profound discourses, which had evidently been a succession of mysteries to most of those who heard—had been speaking of Himself as the living bread which came down from heaven, declaring that the bread which He would give was His flesh, which He would give for the life of the world, and promising that he who ate that bread should live for ever. And the disciples, while they caught the ring of truth in their Master's tones, were nevertheless

strangers in their inmost hearts to the things of which their Master spoke : when He told them of the deepest things of the spiritual life, His speech touched no answering chords—or at least touched chords which answered only feebly—in their souls ; and, though they believed He possessed the truth and revealed it, the depths of them were unstirred. He might have the words of eternal life, and they might unhesitatingly confess that. But His proclamation of eternal life did not waken any moral or spiritual emotion in them, did not touch their hearts. And it is of some interest to find Peter acting as the spokesman for the band in this mere intellectual conviction of Christ's greatness, a conviction that had no depth of moral feeling behind it ; for at another time he exemplified exactly the opposite condition. When he impetuously declared, " If all shall be offended in thee, I will never be offended," and followed up the declaration by the still more daring boast, " Even if I must die with thee, yet will I not deny thee "—he showed a moral earnestness and a moral feeling which had no thought to back it up. It is depth of moral emotion without intellectual conviction *there :* the heart was stirred, while the mind was asleep. It is intellectual conviction without moral emotion *here:* the mind recognises the truth and greatness of Christ, while the heart does not leap up to respond to the things whereof He speaks. Eternal life, the bread of life, the need of these things—it was all a strange tongue. Peter and the rest of the hearers had never sounded such profundities of moral experience as these. They accepted Christ's words about them

and believed them; but they did not feel their reality and their worth.

It is just this lack of moral experience, of moral feeling, which lies beneath men's forsaking of goodness and of Christ to-day. Outside the Church and inside the Church alike, there is little or no enthusiasm for moral conditions: men are not stirred by moral ideals. The words which tell of moral realities are little more than words. Goodness, sin, conscience—how powerlessly they fall upon hearts which ought to be roused by them! Outside the Church men never question the supremacy of goodness; but whoever feels within himself a longing for goodness which gives him no rest, or a remorse, when he has violated goodness, which seems to turn his whole nature upside down, as it were, by the awful shock and storm of it? Who cares anything at all about such things? They all believe in them, but who feels them, who cares about them? Not one in a thousand. Inside the Church, we, whose very existence is based on the supremacy of goodness—goodness as revealed to the world from the beginning by God, goodness as manifested to the world in perfect manifestation by Christ—we, to our shame, are strangers to the deeper emotions which should come to those who profess to care about goodness and to give themselves to its quest. Who of us knows anything about the profounder experiences of the spiritual life? Who of us is ever—or, at any rate, often—stirred to the furthest depths of us by the desire for Christliness, by the sense of sin? We all believe in these things, of course. Yes, but the devils also believe, and tremble

too. And we, God forgive us, are by so much behind them, that we content ourselves with the mere believing, and are not roused to profound emotion, to sacred earnestness and holy fear, by the things wherein we believe. Goodness and Christ acknowledged the best—but it is to so great an extent an acknowledgment of the intellect merely, in which heart and soul have no part.

And there comes to each one of us often and often in our moral and spiritual life, as there came to Peter and the disciples, a moment when we realise that the best means sacrifice. *Then* they left Him and fled. The mere intellectual conviction of His truthfulness and His spiritual greatness could not keep them close to Him then, or make them willing to share the trial through which He had to go. So do we easily put aside our intellectual convictions about the supremacy of goodness and of Christ, when the test of sacrifice presents itself. That is what we are so constantly doing. There is not sufficient intensity of moral life in us to save us. When the demands of Christ clash with the conveniences and profits of our common life, the demands of Christ are easily thrust aside, since in our discipleship to Him the heart, the heart's emotion, the heart's passion, is not deeply enough engaged. We believe in Him all the time, but we leave Him all the same. Not until goodness, holiness, Christ, are so burningly real to us that our moral nature is stirred to its depths by them, shall we be saved from having daily written over our lives the sad verdict of failure—that we have left Him, and fled.

And notice the shame, the unutterable shame, into which these disciples were driven by their lack of deep moral feeling. "Then all the disciples left him, and fled." It is a pitiable exhibition. Peter's course was a little different from that of the others, for he did follow a little way, even though his transient daring only ended in the cowardice which denied his Lord. But the rest of them cared for nothing but to stand aside from the drama which was being enacted: to destroy all connection between themselves and Christ was the only thing that occurred to them to do: all they desired was to ignore the whole matter, as though it were no concern of theirs.

So they lost—this was the shame that came upon these men who should have been heroes—they lost the honour and glory of siding with Goodness as it struggled on to victory. Had they been brave instead of faint-hearted, the outward course of events would in all probability have been the same. Had they stood by their Master and dared their lives for Him, the end of it all would have been in no wise different from what it was: they could only have shared His doom. But the shame which lies upon them would at least have been spared. They would have stood in history as heroes faithful to the cause, instead of as traitors to it in its time of need. The Christ went on to His cross, and from His cross to His ever-growing power over the hearts of men —and these, who should have been His helpers, stood aside.

So, when we leave Him and flee, when here and there we cut ourselves off from discipleship to Him—

as we are so often doing—we lose the honour and glory of siding with our Lord as He goes on to His triumph, and we bring upon ourselves the shame of letting Him carry through His work alone. When the test came to us, and we fell under it, and, rather than dare what our discipleship bade us dare, surrendered the discipleship and stood aside—the Christ whom we left forsaken still achieved that wherein we should have stood by Him; and it is we that have lost. The glory of it is not ours to share: our crown must be for ever less bright. When we cut off this or that part of our life from Him and said, "In these things we cannot let Him have perfect sway. He is Highest and Best indeed, but this is too much, and we cannot follow Him here"—He wanted that part of our life, wanted it to tell in the advancement of His work. And, because we withdrew it from Him—because we left Him and fled—the honour of serving Him passed from us, and His purposes were accomplished by other service than ours. The Christ will see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied: no cowardice, no forsaking, will thwart His purpose or hinder the firm and enduring establishment of His throne; but on us who have been cowards, on us who have forsaken Him, an abiding shame must rest.

It is a pitiable exhibition indeed. The members of the Christian Church standing aside from, bearing little part—or sometimes, for a while at least, no part—in the onward sweep of Christ's cause, since it has not stirred their hearts. That is the meanness into which by our faithlessness we fall. They left

Him, and fled—but He won His place as the world's King all the same. We leave Him and flee—but, in spite of our cowardice, He will be the world's King still. And for the great triumph we shall not have done our part, and can look for no "Well done!"

Yet these came back, and there is hope in that. The same men who ran in base cowardice here, were afterwards the apostles of the Christian Church, the martyrs of the Christian faith. Christ does not close the door behind us for our first forsaking, nor forbid us to enter in again. As they came back, so may we. That deep moral earnestness which at first these disciples lacked, and the want of which made them unable to stand firm, stirred their hearts at length; and they were faithful unto death then. So may we begin our discipleship over again to-day—with something more than an intellectual recognition of Christ's greatness—with a kindling of deep emotion and a stirring up of the heart's half-dead fires. Care more about the goodness Christ reveals, love it more, be more in earnest about it. Let all the great causes, the worthy ideals, the lofty enthusiasms, the sacred aims, which are identified with Christ's name, not only appeal to the approval of the intellect, but take possession of the emotion of the heart. Let us not alone recognise Christ as the Highest and the Best, but have our whole natures yearning for the Highest and the Best. Live more deeply, more intimately, in the moral and spiritual sphere. He who represents all moral and spiritual ideals will hold His power over us then, and we shall not pass from His side.

Acknowledge goodness and the Christ who is goodness—but go further than that. Let your heart long for goodness and Christ, and wait with straining anxiety for the answer of goodness and Christ to your heart. Then, even though allegiance to goodness and Christ mean sacrifice, in the sacrifice shall be no terror for the aspiring soul, nor will any pain of sacrifice ever make it turn away. We shall not leave our Christ, if He has stirred us to the depths. For those who have in their heart of hearts felt the solemn reality of all good and all Christly things—for them faithlessness cannot be.

XII

THREE ATTITUDES OF MIND TOWARDS POSSIBLE SIN

"Peter saith unto him, Even if I must die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples."—MATTHEW xxvi. 35.

"And as they were eating, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began to say unto him every one, Is it I, Lord?"—MATTHEW xxvi. 21, 22.

"We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that was begotten of God keepeth him, and the evil one toucheth him not. We know that we are of God."—1 JOHN v. 18, 19.

IF the connection between these three passages is not wholly apparent at a first glance, it will nevertheless, I think, take only a few words to make it clear. In the first passage you have the utterance, by Peter and by the other disciples, of their somewhat careless confidence in their own steadfastness. The shadows of the coming doom were falling round the Christ; and, added to all else, He had the sharp pain of foreseeing the faithlessness of those whom He loved. "All ye shall be offended because of me this night." Peter is

quick to repudiate the suspicion of possible weakness for himself, and, when Jesus goes on to tell him of the terrible sin of denial which would even that same day blacken his heart, with something like indignation he replies, "Even if I must die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." And the other disciples join their assurance to his. You have there, then, confidence, over-confidence, confidence wrongly based, as to the issues of a conflict with temptation. The disciples trusted themselves: they did not mean to fall.

In the second passage you have hesitation and doubt, instead of confidence, as to possible sin. In the sacred hour of their last common meal together Jesus imparts to His friends the dread secret, which falls like a thunderbolt among them, that one of them should betray Him. One would suppose that each disciple would reject for himself—reject with vehemence and scorn—the possibility of an act so unspeakably base: we half expect to hear, coming from the lips of every one in turn, the reply, "I, at least, am not the traitor." But it is as though some dread and nameless shadow were hanging over the company; and not one appears to be sure of himself. "And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began to say unto him every one, Is it I, Lord?" There, then, you have hesitancy, self-doubt, as to a battle with sin. Not even against so dire a crime as that of betraying the Master did the disciples at that moment feel themselves secure.

In the third passage we come upon confidence again, though not the confidence which we found in

the first. John is confident, as the disciples were, that he and those to whom he writes shall not fall into sin; but he is confident, not because he trusts in his own steadfastness and moral resolution or in theirs, but because he knows that he and they are born of God. "Whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not. . . . We know that we are of God." It is the calm and quiet assurance of a man who has solved all the problems of his spiritual destiny, and has hidden himself away from the power of evil in the power of God. There, then, you have the confidence that is rightly founded and can never be put to shame.

I want to take these three attitudes of mind towards possibilities of sin as the verses suggest them—first, confidence wrongly based: next, self-doubt; and last, confidence rightly based.

First, the over-confidence, the confidence wrongly founded, the confidence based on a trust in self. Peter and the other disciples were convinced that no temptation to deny their Master could ever overcome their devotion or break down their loyalty. And over-confidence similar to that which deluded them lurks in many of us to-day, in all of us to some degree, even in those of us who have most truly humbled ourselves before God. We acknowledge that we are prone to wander and to fall, and we are sincere in the acknowledgment, but we acknowledge it with some limitations. Daily, we know, will our hearts be stained and blackened by the mark of transgression unless the divine grace

keep us; but when we thus admit our weakness, our liability to error and fault, we are thinking of the comparatively small slips that so often overtake us, and the possibility of greater—of the greatest—sins is far from our thought. Did some voice speak forth to us now the words which the voice of Christ uttered to the disciples, and tell us that ere long we should be offended in Him and deny Him, should we not almost resent the imputation, and declare that such a thing could never be? "Forget Him for a moment, perhaps I may: be false to His command in some hour of temporary self-will, perhaps I may; but offence, denial—how could my heart, which has discerned His beauty and felt His love, be guilty of baseness so extreme?" And yet it is well to face the facts, and to realise that for security from the foulest sin, as well as for preservation from the lesser sins, our own resolution and steadfastness is not a sufficient guard. The confidence we so often entertain that, though against the daily temptations which beset us we can be shielded only by the divine protecting grace, yet against the extremity of sinfulness we are in ourselves secure—that confidence is the over-confidence, the confidence wrongly based, which Peter possessed, and which was so rudely shaken ere the day was past.

Let me try to indicate how this over-confidence ignores some of the facts of our nature, and how it is therefore based on a false foundation. It ignores first and foremost the fact that there is in all of us some particular place of weakness; and the very temptation against which we foolishly feel ourselves

secure may address itself precisely to that weakness. Peter was so sure of himself just because he did not know himself aright. Had he understood that deep in his nature there lurked the besetting fault of cowardice, the accents of unfaltering assurance would have died out of his tones as he spoke. It was to the cowardliness of his nature that his great temptation appealed; and by his cowardliness he fell. And so there is in many of us some particular spot where the appeal of evil may find an easy lodgment—and we may not know it until the deed of sin is done! There, of all places we say sometimes when the attack has swept down our guard and mastered us—there of all places to have been weak! That sin of all others to have had the greatest power over me! Often it is not until the temptation has come and conquered, and all the shame and bitterness of humiliation and defeat are overwhelming us, that we understand our hearts aright. "My soul is proof against the great temptations," you may think; and you may be right, except for the one weakness of your nature which you have forgotten or have never known. Do not feel sure of yourself until you know yourself better.

And this over-confidence ignores, too, the power of circumstances to break down the firmest resolution. A sin looks so different at some times from what it does at others: amid one environment it may fill our soul with loathing, while amid another it may have an attraction and sweetness for us we had never seen in it before; and, though it may have no power over us to-day, to-morrow, because it

presents itself to us in altered garb or in other circumstances, it may hold us helpless in its iron grasp. I can well believe that to Peter, with the Christ's look resting on him, with the Christ's voice ringing in his ears, with all the memory of their companionship surrounding him—I can well believe that it seemed impossible to him *then* that his lips should ever shape the word of denial; but it was different—ah! so different—when the sneering by-standers taunted him for his acquaintance with the man who was being mocked and buffeted just outside. And so, though we stand up proudly in our strength and defy the power of evil to drag us into captivity, the hour may be creeping on when the surroundings, the circumstances amid which we are placed may deliver us an easy prey to the temptation which we scornfully spurn to-day. Remember the power of circumstance.

And over-confidence ignores also the fact that men so often lose themselves, and for a time almost appear to be some one else, and will in that hour of their transformation descend to depths of sin from which ordinarily they would recoil. "*I* would not commit that sin," you say. No; but it is done through you at some time when you are not true to yourself and have no mastery over yourself. So strange is the human heart, that when some torrent of evil influence sweeps over it, it is often carried wholly off its balance, and for an hour of sinful madness the man of high principle and hitherto stainless conduct becomes a criminal of the deepest dye. He is carried out of himself: he is not himself

when the crime is done ; but yet it is his brain that designs it, his hand that carries it through. And so, while you unhesitatingly trust yourself, some storm of evil powers may sweep upon you and carry you away. You may lose yourself in the storm, and fall into sins from which in your better moments you would shrink away.

These three things, then, does the self-confidence that was in Peter and is often in us forget to take into account. It forgets that in all of us there is some special spot of weakness : it forgets the power of circumstances to break down the strongest resolution : it forgets how completely a man may, in some hour when hell sweeps over him, lose himself.

Need I say that this self-confidence, this confidence wrongly based, exercises an influence that is most harmful upon the growth and development of the spiritual life ? When we have trusted ourselves and have been put to shame in the midst of our trust, we are thrown so low that it may take long to pull ourselves together for fresh spiritual effort and enterprise. You remember how, when Peter's self-confidence was betrayed, he went out, as that reproachful and yet loving look was turned on him, and wept bitterly ? And I think that in that hour of his lowest degradation the world must have looked very dark to Peter and he must, for a moment at least, have doubted whether he had not shut himself out for ever from the place of a disciple to his Lord. Not immediately could he free himself from the haunting memory of his failure and his sin—not, I think, for long. And

so, when our self-trust brings us to shame, as it always does sooner or later, we may perhaps lie for long in the ruins of our past before we can start to build afresh for the future. We need to take the warning that this is one of the dangers besetting the man who trusts himself—when he fails, his humiliation may be so bitter and abject—will be, if he be in any wise a true man—that the weight of it will hold him back, for a time at any rate, from renewed pursuit of sacred ideals. He will feel himself unworthy to enter into the pursuit again. The bitterness of shame will choke aspiration and endeavour.

I pass now to the self-doubt As Jesus told the disciples, seated with Him round the table, how the spirit of treachery would impel one of them to act the basest part to which treachery could descend, they are troubled, every one, with the apprehension, "I, perhaps, am the one who, the Master foresees, will do the traitorous deed." "And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began to say unto him every one, Is it I, Lord?" And so there are many who walk always tremblingly, their souls pricked with fears, conscious of the abysses of evil that yawn on each side of their pathway, and dreading every hour lest they be ensnared. Disciples though they be, they dare not hope that the ardour of their discipleship is wholly proof against every insidious influence or open attack; and they are haunted by the vision of dread possibilities of sin to which they feel themselves exposed. There are many with hearts so sensitive, with souls so keenly alive to

their own weaknesses and imperfections, that they cannot, even for an hour, rid themselves of the apprehension of an imminent and measureless fall.

In all serious minds the self-confidence of which I have spoken passes at some time or other into this self-doubt. When we have relied upon ourselves and have failed, by a natural reaction we slip to the other extreme, and fear, ever-present fear, takes possession of us. And self-doubt, though not the highest condition, is nevertheless better than the over-confidence in self, inasmuch as it is always better to face the facts and grasp the realities of our existence. The man who has an overpowering dread of what his heart's frailties and corruptions may lead him to, at least understands something of what his own heart is, and is so far above the deluded man who deems his nature secure from assault. It is always wise to understand the facts and grasp the realities of life.

And yet it is not in this constant, haunting fear that we are called to live. I want you to see where such a life as this fails. It shows that we have not realised God's ideal of life for us, nor the real relationship between us and Him. I fancy that Christ, as there came to Him from one and another round the communion board, the enquiry which revealed how insecure the disciples felt their allegiance at that time to be—I can fancy that Christ would feel something like this, Is this all that I have done for you, all that our common life and intercourse has accomplished while we have gone about together? Has My spirit so little magnetism over yours, that you are uncertain whether any

moment might not break the bond? How far the disciples were from understanding what Christ could do for them and what His power over them might be and what the relationship between themselves and Him should represent! And so, when we tremble lest some evil power should suddenly break upon us and hurl us into depths of degradation and sin, I think God might say to us, Is this all I have done for you? Does the relationship between your heart and Mine, between your life and Mine, mean no more than this? God's ideal of life for us is a life which is redeemed; and a life which is redeemed means a life which is delivered from all tyrannies, snatched away from all alien powers, brought out into security and liberty and joy! Surely the fear of failure is not to be the dominant thing in our experience, as it so often is. Can you think that the son of a powerful and rich monarch would ever be haunted by the fear of poverty and want, or visited by the spectre of possible hardship and anxiety? And we are sons of a King whose kingship is one, not of treasure or of pomp, but one of holiness; and yet, with all His wealth of holiness ready to be given to us so far as our finite natures can receive it, we are haunted for ever by the dread of slavery to the powers of sin! Realise God's ideal of life for you. He means us to be holy, as He is holy. The very thought of that high destiny will make our fear-haunted lives contemptible in our eyes. Gird yourself up to grasp and appropriate to yourself all that your relationship to God sets within your reach.

And just as confidence in self exerts a harmful

influence on spiritual growth, so does a too extreme self-doubt also. By the constantly-haunting fear of failure the soul is choked in its efforts to breathe the higher air: if we be possessed always by the apprehension of being cast down into some dark pit of sin, the apprehension will lie upon us like a weight that bars us back from the deepest experiences of peace and joy; and our hearts, even in their seasons of exaltation and clear spiritual vision, will be chilled by the thought that ere long the exaltation may give place to profoundest gloom. Not until we are delivered from the burden of an unceasing fear for ourselves can we be free to give ourselves with calm and quiet power to the cultivation of spiritual character and grace.

If, then, we are on the one hand not to trust ourselves too implicitly, and on the other hand not to live in constant self-doubt, what alternative remains? And that brings me to the idea of the third passage—the confidence rightly based which is revealed in these words of John: "We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that was begotten of God keepeth him, and the evil one toucheth him not." "We know that we are of God." It is confidence, but not self-confidence: it is the confidence which comes from losing self in God. Try to grasp the profound idea which underlies this utterance. "Whosoever is begotten of God." That is, whosoever has entered into so intimate a communion with the divine nature that he has come in some measure to share it as a child shares the nature

of his parent, *he* is safe, because the powers of evil can never touch the life of God which now is his. And it is worth noting how the rendering given in the Revised Version deepens the thought. The Authorised Version runs, "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself." The Revised Version says, "Whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that was begotten of God keepeth him." "He that was begotten of God"—that is, Christ, keepeth him. It means this—when we become children of God, truly children of God, Christ says to us, "You are now sons and daughters, as I am a Son; and I withdraw you with me into the recesses of the divine, the eternal life, whither the touch of the evil one cannot follow you." Just in proportion as we realise what it means to be begotten of God, just in that proportion do we conquer sin, since we are carried out of the reach of sin. We are sharers of the life of God; and, since evil cannot touch God's life, it cannot touch ours. It is more than divine help: it is the victorious God *in* us. Lose yourself in God. Take as the ideal of the relationship between yourself and God that you are to be partaker in His nature and possessor of His life. Be begotten of God, so that you drop your own life, so to say, as a thing out-worn and useless, and let God live in you—and then you have passed out of the range of all evil powers. "Whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not." "The evil one toucheth him not."

Do you grasp the idea? You know how, when a man is possessed by some great passion, when he

surrenders his whole nature to some absorbing pursuit which engages all his energies, you know how all the world comes to appear to him as though it were unreal, almost as though it did not exist at all. Literature, art, music—to take examples—may become so entirely the passion of a man's life that he lives wholly for them and in them, and is dead to all else. The common joys and sorrows of his fellow men—the experiences which are the outstanding experiences in the lives of most—pass by such an one almost unnoticed: he is conscious only of his art, his literature, his music: they fill the world for him. I wish we could be so filled by a passion for God, that all worldliness and sin might be to us as if it did not exist, and that its appeal to our natures might powerlessly recoil, as the futile tides recoil from the steadfast rocks! I wish we could be so dominated, ruled, possessed in every remotest corner and fibre of our being by the life of God, that truly we might be said to be begotten of Him! Then would our sins and our repentances, our resolutions and our failures, our promises and our abject treacheries to the promises we have made, be past! So swept in our inmost being by the divine life, we should be kept, and the evil one touch us not.

That is John's thought. We may be confident, when the divine life in us fights our battles for us. When God is in us, we may be sure of victory, since God cannot be beaten. Not all the devils in the universe can ever overcome God, or the heart wherein He dwells. "We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not." It is the quiet assurance of a

man who bears within him the secret of immortal triumph.

Pass from the self-trust. Pass on, too, from the self-doubt. Self-trust is foolish: self-doubt is unrest that wears the heart's peace away. Pass to God, in thought, in contemplation, in love, in the heart's passionate devotion. Let our life be His, His life be ours. Let Him be the source of all our life. Let us be begotten of Him. So may we be able to join with the deep-seeing apostle, and to say, "We know that we are of God."

XIII

GOD'S LIFE THE MEASURE OF OUR DESTINY

"Art not thou from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die."—HABAKKUK i. 12.

IN a momentary flash of insight the prophet catches sight of the truth which will cheer him and cheer his nation amid all the troubles by which they are beset. They need something to encourage them, need it sorely; for the invader's triumph appears to be absolute, and hope is almost utterly gone. The prophet sees his loved land downtrodden: the Chaldeans, "that bitter and hasty nation," are on all hands marching "through the breadth of the earth to possess dwelling-places that are not theirs"; and the onlooker's heart dies within him at the sight. Where can any hope or help be left? He has cried unto his Lord, and seemingly He has not heard. Are these alien armies to be allowed to destroy the chosen nation of God, and make it so that its very name shall hardly be remembered? There appears small chance of any better fate. And yet the prophet

cannot reconcile himself to believe in a tragedy so awful and complete: surely, surely, a way of escape must somehow open; and he appears to strain his eyes through the utter darkness and to grope with feeble hands of hope through the encompassing dangers, to see if perchance some ray of light may not find its way to cheer him or some unthought-of possibility of redemption may not be revealed.

And suddenly, at the very extremity of his despair, his confidence returns. "Art not thou from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die." The chosen ones cannot be beaten after all—so a sudden inspiration reminds him—for God cannot be beaten: just because God has chosen them, they must be invincible, immortal, as He. Destruction, death—they are not worth naming or thinking about; for everlasting as God is, so everlasting, too, must God's own people be. What God is, that we are, that we shall be—that is the great fact of which for an instant the prophet gets a glimpse, the great fact which makes nothing of all the oppressions and hardships and threatening fates that overhung the harassed nation. He looks up from it all, and the quick inspiration comes by which his heart is able to say within him, "Death may threaten, destruction loom before us; but Thou, our Lord, our God, our Holy One, art everlasting, and what Thou art, that are we." "Art not *thou* from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? *we* shall not die." "There is something in us that makes us share Thy greatness. Thy greatness, Thine immortality, is ours—for we are Thine own."

It may be taken as an utterance of humanity in its moment of keenest insight and highest inspiration. There is no idea more thrilling, no idea that can more wondrously re-awaken hope and confidence within us when hope and confidence have been shaken to their foundations, no idea that can better help us to realise our greatness, our certainty of victory and immortality, than this—that what God is, we must be. Because God is almighty, we too must conquer all things, for we are God's. Because God is everlasting, we too cannot die, for we are God's. For ever may our hearts turn to Him from the oppressions and threatenings of our human life, and say with utter calmness and repose, "But Thy greatness must be at last mine—as Thou art, I at last must be—for Thou hast chosen me and called me Thine own."

I say that the great idea which in all circumstances may inspire us, the great idea which redeems life from all its disabilities and oppressions and heavinesses is this—the certainty that as God is, we must be—that because God is great, we are and shall be great—that there is a greatness for us, a greatness in us, which answers to the greatness of God Himself. Side by side with our conception of the wonder of God's greatness, we are to set, not always the contrasted conception of our own littleness, but the inspiring conception of our own greatness too. Is not He holy? Then *we* cannot be the prey and sport of evil: there must be a destiny of holiness for us too, for we are His. Is not He everlasting, immortal, set above death? Then *we* cannot die:

there must be an immortality for us too; for we are His. It is important to have right ideas about God, about what God is: it is at any rate equally important that, when we have them, they should influence us aright. A correct apprehension of the greatness of God's life and being is not much use unless we turn it into an inspiration for our own life and being. God never meant us, as we look up to Him and as with growing vividness we catch the revelation of Him in His infinitude and power—He never meant us to be overwhelmed by His infinitude, smitten down into utter self-abasement and self-hopelessness by His power, crushed by the unspeakable wonder of His majesty and glory. Rather does He mean us from the surpassing splendour of His life to learn the splendid possibilities of ours, from all the wonder of His being to learn how wonderful ours shall be when it has been consummated and crowned according to His will. Of course it is well sometimes to recollect how far we are, even at our best, from the perfections and glories of our God, sometimes to lie in humble confession of our lowliness at His feet; but not that by the confession of our distance and our lowliness we may feel ourselves belittled and degraded—rather that we may be reminded how grand is the life that waits for us when we shall have made nearer approach to Him, when He shall have drawn us to higher levels and nearer to Himself. We are wrong when we insist too much on the things that seem to put us far from God, and forget that He has created us in order to set His own likeness within us. It is doing small honour to God's workmanship

to sing, "Great God, how infinite art Thou! What worthless worms are we!"—just as though anything God has made ever could be a worthless worm, or as if the highest expression of religion were to call ourselves names. He wants us to be inspired, not crushed, by the thought of His greatness; for His greatness is to be ours, since He has chosen us, and we are His own.

For this is really involved in the Fatherhood of God. If God be our Father, then our life must grow for ever toward the greatness of His—His Fatherhood to us can have no other meaning than that. If He be Father, then in our degree His own nature, His own life, is in us, and our growth must lead us on toward His fulness, to be as He is. And when Christ came, the emphasis of His revelation fell on that, and by that He altered the entire aspect of human life and changed the face of the world. The prophet based his hope on the fact that God had chosen the people. Had He not given sign upon sign that they were His beloved ones, that upon them His special grace and favour had been set? And surely—so the prophet's yearning, anxious heart tries to plead against the hardness of fate—surely God will not now make that choosing of none effect, and leave us? And that was something: the Lord had taken the people to be His own, and over and over again had proved it and ratified the bond—He would not fail them now. But we have a hope, a certainty, rather, more firmly based than even that. God is your Father—so the message has been proclaimed; and that means, not that He has only chosen us, but

that He has put something of His own life into us—not that He has only made a covenant with us on which we may rely, but that He has put something of His own life into us. And that is more. God is in us—that is our redemption: the beginnings of a life like God's are in us—that is our certainty of triumph, our glorious charter of final victory and greatness. Far from Him, far beneath Him, although in our littleness we may appear to be, we are still like Him: still is our life a part of His own, derived from His own, and must grow up toward the perfectness and fulness of His. What He is, we shall be. And we have so often failed to realise that transcendent, that redeeming truth. God is our Father: it means—we have so belittled its meaning—that there is kindness in His heart toward us. But it means far more than that. It means—we have said—that He watches over our life, wards off the danger, heals the pain. But it means far more than that. It means—we have taken it thus—that He has given many a promise, spoken many a gracious word. But it means far more than that. God has pledged Himself to our ultimate victory and greatness far more firmly than by any of these things. He has put *Himself* into us; and, low as our life may be, it has in it all the possibility of being like His own.

Can you find any more inspiring faith than that with which to face your life? It makes nothing at once of all the things that threaten destruction and loss. God's life grows in us, and they cannot touch that. It is like the utterance of some magic spell that charms all the hostile powers away, to say within

our souls that what God is, we shall be. What does anything matter, if in our heart of hearts we know that? Just as Michael Angelo, with the sculptor's penetration, saw the possibilities of beauty that were hidden in the rough marble block, and said, "There is an angel in that marble, and I will set him free"— so we, with the penetration of our faith in God's true Fatherhood toward us, may discern the possibilities of better things hidden beneath the roughness of our present unfinished life, and may know that at last there shall be brought out upon us and within us the greatness and fairness of God. Always may our hearts, humble indeed, yet unfalteringly confident too, look up and say, "Art not thou from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die."

We want to be daring enough to believe in great things for ourselves. To have low ideas of ourselves is really to have low ideas about God. Did He make us for any less destiny than that our life should come back to him in greatness and victory? Has He left the ends hanging loose, not bound our life firmly to His own? That would have been failure. God's own greatness is not complete until He has given a corresponding greatness to us: He is Himself greatest of all in creating a life which answers heart to heart, soul to soul, with His own. And the daring which believes in a great destiny for ourselves is the truest humility too. We can trust in ourselves only because we utterly trust God. He has made us so that our nature yearns after Him, points towards Him: He has called Himself our Father. And

He is true, we know. And so, what He is, we shall be.

And now I want you to see how this great thought, that because God is our Father, because we are His, we must at last be as He is—I want you to see how this thought has in it something which illumines the darkness of all our life's problems for us, and enables us, if not at once to solve them, to feel assured at any rate that solved they shall be. Every difficulty ceases to be a difficulty—our hearts can no more vex themselves over this riddle or over that—when we have assured ourselves that what God is, we shall be. That assurance is the one answer to our perplexities which will bear every strain, the one condensed philosophy of life, one might say, which nothing can make invalid or overthrow. I want you to see how this great assurance suffices for us through all the varied phases of life's trial, whether it be through our life's bitter conflict against sin or through our life's bearing of sorrow or through our life's sinking into death. In all, we are redeemed and upheld by the certainty that our life is one with God's, and cannot fail any more than God's can fail.

I say that this thought suffices in our life's bitter conflict against sin. You look on our moral struggle, our unceasing battle with the baseness in ourselves; and in that tremendous fight the assurance that what God is we are made to be brings certainty of victory. We need something that can give us the absolute certainty of triumph at last, do we not? With the unworthy instincts in us so strong—so strong still, we

have to confess, that they seem hardly at all subdued from the power they had when we first began to look up from the low things to the higher—how can we be sure that we shall escape from their tyranny at last? With the longest struggle, we really attain so little: we keep a strong hand upon ourselves, we spur our lagging and quickly-wearied energies on to the pursuit of goodness; and then, when in an instant of lassitude we let our grip upon ourselves grow slack and pause in the fevered quest, it is as if the devils we had restrained swooped down upon us again, and all our work is undone. How can we be certain that at last we shall overcome? Fight on, they say, and do not let the defeats discourage you—but often our anguished and self-despairing souls cannot answer to that call. But remember that what God is, we must be, because we are His and His life is in us, and the defeats will not discourage us then. To His great holiness we must reach at last, for we are made to be like Him. It is not merely that we hope for victory, that we trust with a trust more or less strong that God will not let us fail. We know that God *cannot* let us fail, if we are not wholly rebellious, because our life, spite of all the touches of sin that seem to spoil it, is really part of His own. Is not *He* throned in absolute purity and holiness? Then *we* shall not and cannot be the prey of sin for ever. For we are of Him: we are His. The children must be perfected, because the Father in heaven is perfect; and what He is, they must be.

And I say that this thought suffices in our life's bearing of sorrow. Where shall we find anything

that can make our disappointments light and our pains lose their power to draw forth our tears, if we do not find it here—in the thought that what God is, we shall be? Your life is a discipline for you, they say. True, and it is one of the greatest truths the mind can grasp. But how do I know that I shall not miss the point and profit of the discipline, and come out of it *undisciplined* at the end? How may I be sure that life will really teach me its lessons, that my sorrows and disappointments and pains will really give to me the secret of grace and blessing they hold? But remember that what God is, we must be, because we are His and His life in us, and we shall know that life must do its appointed work in us then. Our experience must lead us on towards the perfectness of God's own life, for we are made to be like Him. It is not merely, I say again, that we hope that all things work together for good. We know that they *must*, if we are not wholly rebellious, because our life is really part of God's own. Is not *He* established in eternal peace? Then *we* shall not and cannot be the sport of that which seems to destroy our peace. For we are of Him: we are His. The Father's children must enter at last into the Father's peace and rest.

And then I say that this thought suffices as our life sinks into death. Construct what arguments for immortality, along other lines, you may, you cannot wholly satisfy the mind or still the doubts and questionings that arise. May there not be a flaw somewhere that vitiates the whole proof?—so the haunting voice of doubt keeps on. We draw up our arguments, our proofs—as we call them for a while

—but as death's frowning countenance looks on us, we can only repeat our arguments with stammering tongues, and somehow the proofs have not the power we thought they had. That utter darkness there—that sheer fall into the black void—that strikes silence on all our reasonings, and we cannot trust them any more. But this is powerful still—that what God is, we must be, because we are His and His life is in us. We can face death itself, and face it out, with that! Is not *He* set far above touch of death—then *we* shall shake off the cold grip of its hand too. "Art not thou from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die." Can the life of God in us ever come to nothing? Could the very pulses of God—which, because He is Father, are in us—could they ever cease to beat? Nay, to His great immortality we must come at last, for we are made to be like Him. Death is but the touch of the hand that strikes the likeness deeper. We are of Him: we are His. The Father's children must reach at last to the power of the Father's endless life.

O face your living and face your dying so! From the shadows of sin and the shadows of sorrow and the shadows of death, uplift your heart to God, and say, "As Thou art, so wilt Thou at last make me to be." By that great idea form all your estimates of life, your hopes, your ideals. For our encouragement may we say always within our own souls, "This is my destiny, that the Father's life in me shall attain to the Father's fulness." Yet, if I may say this other thing, we should remind ourselves of that glorious destiny of ours, not alone for our encourage-

ment, but for our deepening of earnestness too. We are made to be as God is: we share His life: we are of Him. Very well, but then—*Noblesse oblige.* If that be our high destiny, let us at least seek to be worthy of it. As God is, we are to be—but take it, not only as a message by which we may be comforted, but as a call by which we may be made men. We want, want always—do we not?—something to spur us, to rouse us out of littleness, to quicken in us the fire that will make life glow and burn with ardour and aspiration. Surely we have it here—in the assurance that God has made us to be as He is, has breathed into us not only the breath of life, but the breath of His own life, set into our souls possibilities of greatness and worthiness which are bounded only by His own greatness and worthiness, that what He is, we are to be. Surely they who have such a hope, such an assurance, such a prospect, such a God—surely they at least should be the moral and spiritual aristocracy of the world.

Have great hopes for yourself. Take large views of the possibilities which await realisation for you. Measure them by what God is. Art not Thou holy, and victorious, and immortal? So must we be. Take His very greatness as an encouragement, because it shows how great we are, how great we shall be. As we look up to God, throned on the heights that seem inaccessible, glorified in the light which it seems no man can hope to approach unto, we may hear a voice, though we do not see the speaker—a voice that says, "The heights are not inaccessible: the divine life in

you shall surmount them at last. The light will not be unapproachable and unbearable for ever: the divine life in you will grow strong to bear the glory at last." To Himself He leads us on. No less than this is His will for us, that we shall be as He is. And for ever and for ever, because we are His, from glory to glory must we range, entering more fully, as through eternity we draw nearer to Him and know Him more, into the greatness and holiness and triumphant immortality that are His.

"Art not thou from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die."

XIV

THE VICTORY OF THE GOD-BORN SOUL

"And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"—1 JOHN v. 5.

OF course the first thing suggested by the text is the inquiry, How can a belief, a mere belief, have consequences so great as the consequences ascribed to this belief in the apostle's words? You *believe* something, and because you believe it, you *overcome*—how can such a thing be? We may intellectually accept many things, we know, without being in the smallest degree either the better or the worse for their acceptance: there is no necessary connection between the assent of the mind to a doctrine and the moral and spiritual profiting of the soul. How can John have looked upon it as so obvious and indisputable a thing that simply by believing Jesus to be the Son of God we are raised to the exaltation of perfect victory over all?

For the moment, however—though only for the moment—I set that aside: the question will meet us again in a slightly different form before we end. Not forgetting it, therefore, but only leaving it till our tracing out of the apostle's thought brings us face to

face with it once more, let us set ourselves to pick up and connect together those links in the chain of John's reasoning which he has dropped in a fashion somewhat loose about the commencement of this chapter. He has really carried, notwithstanding the apparent disjointedness of his phrases, a strict sequence of ideas within his mind. It is in the order and expression of them that strictness, and perhaps something of clearness, has been lost. But now, if we take this verse, this text of ours, in conjunction with two other verses close by, the chain of reasoning can be quite easily re-made. Will you follow this reference for a moment? John has said, in the fourth verse, "For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world." And he has said, also, in the first verse, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God"—that is, whoso takes Jesus to be the anointed One, the One to whom through His anointing God's own nature has been given, the Son of God, the One most truly begotten of God, whoso takes Him thus is himself begotten of God. And therefore, by strictest inference from these two ideas, the apostle reaches to the conclusion of the text, "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" One can put it, you see, actually in the form of a reasoned syllogism, if I may use the technical term. First, Whosoever is begotten of God overcomes the world; Next, Whosoever believes that Jesus is begotten of God is himself begotten of God; and therefore, Whosoever believes that Jesus is begotten of God overcomes the world. And it is through that ascent and

to that result of thought that I want our minds to keep company with the apostle's mind just now—our text being the goal to which our thought conducts us rather than, as usual, the point from which our thought sets out.

But think first for a moment of the height and greatness of John's ideal in regard to the relation of the Christian disciple to the un-Christian world and to all that is therein. The Christian disciple is to be all-victorious, and the world is to be overcome. Before John's eyes there is spread the spectacle of a conflict, stern and severe, carried on unceasingly between the forces of good, on whose side the Christian has ranged himself, and the forces of evil, grouped all together under the name of "the world," because in the general life of the world they are allowed to have their way. He has accepted once for all the fact that those ideals of character and of conduct whereto the Christian disciple has sworn his allegiance can make no compromise with the ideals which the world pursues: between the programme of holy effort and spiritual aspiration, and the other programme of selfishness and pleasure and sin, even a pretence of reconciliation had best not be made; and futile utterly was it, in this apostle's judgment, to smooth over or hush up the absolute hostility and the fundamental antagonism of the right toward the wrong. God and ungodliness, discipleship and the world—sternly and relentlessly must they ever wage their war.

And those who sought to make their home in the realm of goodness, those who cast in their lot with

Christian discipleship and its demands, were to feel themselves conquerors and lords. The adherents of this new faith, the devotees of these new ideals, were to possess a certainty that to them the supreme secret had been revealed, were to pass along their way bearing within them a sense of superiority to all the forces which did not emanate from the new faith nor tend towards the new ideals. The world and the better life with which the world is engaged in war—no doubt of the issue should there be! Accepting the Christian ideals, using the Christian methods, the consciousness of the Christian disciple should be pervaded with an assurance that to him has been given a pledge of triumph, and that for him the crown of life is sure. For those who rise to the full height of the privilege which discipleship brings, all the forces of evil are beaten down, the world done with and overcome; and though they have to maintain themselves against the world's assault and to repel the advances whereby the world would draw them from their chosen course, still it is with the ease of confident and strong souls, with the undisturbed serenity of hearts not to be defeated or betrayed, that they are to bear themselves through it all.

In the moral and spiritual sphere the note of absolute and entire victory is one we scarcely ever think of raising—or rather, since an absolute and entire victory is after all an ideal, measurelessly far above the level of actual experience as we know it, perhaps one ought to put it that the very thought of absolute and entire victory visits us scarcely at all. To overcome the world—to have all the forces of evil and

wrong trampled down beneath our feet, to be set victoriously once for all above them, to maintain an uninterrupted abandonment to the programme of the better life, recking not of what attacks the world may make or of what temptations the world may fling across our path—needless to say we have not attained to an exaltation so perfect; but have we even hoped for it and striven? We take it as so much the inevitable thing that with quite undiminished anxiety and quite unabating fever of spirit we must carry on our struggle from our discipleship's beginning to our passing from the world: not alone in conflict (for that is indeed the disciple's lot, by no faithful one to be escaped)—not alone in conflict, but in conflict which loses none of its disturbing and distressing elements, do the years of our Christian life come and go: far almost as ever do we remain from the tranquil restfulness, from the self-collectedness and indestructible peace of those who through all the conflict know that the end is sure, and that apprehension there need not be. Yet that is the ideal the apostle suggests. We, set by the very fact of our discipleship into antagonism, and into antagonism which admits not compromise and may not for a moment be disguised, with all the forces and ideals of the lower life, yet feeling ourselves lifted in triumph over them all—able to say with a smile, when they do their worst for our souls' destruction, that these are but the expiring efforts of an enemy whose hour is past. We are to overcome the world.

If we ask, now, how that consciousness of serene

superiority to all that the world is and to all that the world can do is to be wakened within us, we find the reply in that phrase of the apostle's fourth verse—"For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world." God Himself is the One, the only One, who is in His nature inaccessible to the approach of the evil with which He is for ever at war: God Himself is unceasingly setting all the operations of His government to the end and aim of beating down the wrong and smiting it to utter destruction, yet is in the essence of His life far removed from all possibility of being touched by the wrong; and one might say that while God fights against sin, sin has no power to fight against God. Would we, therefore, share in God's separateness from all the processes of evil, set ourselves, as He sets Himself, into declared antagonism toward evil and yet remain untouched, as He in His perfectness remains untouched, by evil —would we be exalted to *overcome*—then must we derive our nature from His, affiliate our nature with His, be in truth begotten of Him. When our moral life, our moral nature, are transmitted, so to say, from God Himself to us—when God in His perfectness is the one and only source of all we are—when moment by moment all the elements of our character and all the movements of our moral being are newborn out of the character and being of God—when the life of our spirit is indeed the offspring of the life of God's spirit—then, because the life in us, being God's, does but repeat the life in Him, then do we overcome. Then, firmly and unchangeably set against "the world"—against all the forces and ideals

of the lower life—firmly and unchangeably set against them as God is, so shall we be, wrestling with them, accepting them as foes to be utterly destroyed; and yet exalted above them all as God is, so too shall we be, never for an instant removed from our place of undisturbed supremacy nor touched in the depths of us by the wrong against which we fight. "Whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world."

I know that any effort to set out in detailed language the fulness of meaning in the apostle's phrase is bound to fail: indeed, one can do little more than repeat the phrase, and leave the meaning to grow slowly into clearness through the meditations of the soul. For there are no analogies in the relationships of man to man which can help us very far into the deep significance of being "begotten of God": no relation known on earth is so close and full as the relation between the life of the soul and the life of God represented by those words; and near as human love may bring human lives together, it can never so entirely link them that one life shall flow out of another, be wholly derived from a life not originally its own. Indeed, perhaps it is by thinking of what human relationships cannot be that we can best reach to an apprehension of what this relationship of being "begotten of God" most truly is. Be human relationships near and dear as they may, we come sooner or later upon the sense of separation and distance: add link to link, establish harmony upon harmony, but ultimately loved and lover live each their own life, with gulfs not to be bridged over between the two. We are begotten of God when

between Him and us that last consciousness of separation and distance has for ever passed away, when we could not tell where the movement of our life ends and the movement of God's life in us begins, when—one should the rather put it—when movement of our own life there is none remaining, and the life of God has swept our life away. It is more than being *like* God: we have to set that expression, for want of a better, into the usage of our common speech; but it is inadequate altogether, and falls far short of correspondence with the reality of the relation that ought to exist. You may have two lives that bear an outward likeness each to each, and that yet have no relationship in the depths of them—two lives that bear an outward likeness each to each, of which it still cannot be said that one is inspired by, born from, the other. We might so mould and machine our lives that through all we do some external appearance of harmony with that which God has revealed of Himself would be discerned, yet remain far from being "begotten of" Him. But when our inward life is only the continuation of God's life, when the movement of our nature is only the flowing into us of the movement of God's nature, when all we are is God Himself in us, then, not till then, have we reached to that profundity of relation with God which the apostle's phrase conveys. And then, with God's nature and God's life substituted for our own, we enter into the serenity and victorious calm that belong to the life and the nature of God, and, as He is ever unassailable and triumphant, so do we overcome the world.

But I leave the phrase, as I said, that its meaning may slowly grow to clearness in the meditations of the soul. "Whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world.'

Thus far, then, have we reached. We are to overcome the world, and we overcome the world by being begotten of God. How may we be begotten of God? —that is the suggestion of which we next stand in need. And for the answer to that enquiry we have to look at John's first verse—"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God." Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed One, the One to whom through His anointing God's own nature has been given, the Son of God, the One most truly begotten of God, whoso believes that is himself begotten of God. We are to overcome: we overcome by being begotten of God: we are begotten of God by believing that Jesus is the Christ.

It is here that we are faced again by the difficulty —in slightly varied form, indeed, but still essentially the same—which we noted at the start. How can a belief, a mere belief, have consequences so great? How can believing that Jesus is the Christ work in us a spiritual transformation so thorough that we can claim thereby to share God's nature, to be begotten of Him?

If we search for a definition of "believing" which shall cover every instance in which the word could be employed, we should have to say, I think, that to believe in a thing is to yield to it and to all that it implies, to meet it in surrender with that part of our

nature whereto it makes its appeal and to allow it there to have its way. To believe a thing—let us take it then—is to yield to it and to all that it implies. Now we may thus yield to, thus believe in, some things, and find that of moral effect they have nothing at all: they make their appeal to the mind and the intellect only, and by the response of the mind and of the intellect the process of belief in them is complete. I believe, for instance, in the multiplication table; but to believe in that only means that I surrender my mind to it, for it is the mind only to which it calls: the fact that twice two make four carries in it no sort of moral implication; and if I learnt it for the first time to-day I should be morally and spiritually precisely what I was before. I believe it and yield to it; but believing and yielding to such a belief as that means simply that the mind assents. Then there are beliefs which touch the heart and soul and conscience with a moral effect of inspiration. If any teacher of virtue, any reformer of conduct, proclaims his message to the world, and I declare myself among those who believe, it means that my practice must conform to the virtue he commands and embody the conduct he advises: it is to practice and conduct, as well as to the mind, that he makes his appeal; and, if I am going truthfully to claim to believe in him, practice and conduct, as well as the mind, must be surrendered, and a result of moral inspiration follow from the belief. But, beyond that, if one should present Himself to me, as Jesus presents Himself to me, as being Himself the possessor of God's nature and of God's life, and as able, by the grip of

His own nature and His own life upon mine, to make me what He is—what is it then to believe in Him? Of course with the assent of the mind to the fact that He *is* possessor of God's nature and of God's life, and that He *can*, by the grip of His own nature and His own life upon mine, make me what He is—of course with that belief must begin; but wholly beyond that belief must go, if it is to be a yielding of ourselves to that in which we believe and to all that it implies. Believing in Him, our life and our nature must be abandoned to the grip of His, so that what He is we may be made: it is to the whole life and character that He makes His appeal, and so, if we believe in Him, it is the whole life and character that must respond. And thus, through our belief, through our yielding of our nature and our life to the grip of His nature and His life—which are God's—our nature and our life are brought to be part of God's, as His are: we are begotten of God: and our believing works a result, not of moral inspiration merely, but of actual moral transformation, within our souls. To believe in Jesus as the Christ, as the Son of God, is to abandon our life to the drawing and the grip of the God-life recognised in Him, and so to be transformed throughout all the range of character, re-created out of diviner materials, as it were, of God begotten in very deed and truth.

I do not, of course, argue here the question whether Jesus is indeed the possessor of God's nature and of God's life, and able, by the grip of His nature and His life upon ours, to make us what He is—whether He be the One born into our world from above or

only the best ever born into our world from below. I seek simply to show how, believing in Him as the One from above, as the God-nature and the God-life drawing ours—believing in Him in the full sense of surrender and yielding that the word conveys—the result of moral and spiritual transformation must follow from the belief, and we must, as the apostle proclaims it, be begotten of God. And by no other acceptance of Jesus than the acceptance of Him as the One from above can that work of spiritual transformation be accomplished. I am far from denying that other acceptances of Jesus, which receive Him, not as the Christ, in the apostle's large meaning, but only as the fairest of the children of men—I am far from denying that in them dwells large power of moral and spiritual inspiration, and even, through that, some power of indirect spiritual transformation and change. But the immediate and direct transforming spell is exercised upon us only by a Jesus who is the Christ, begotten, not through the processes of character-evolution which have made men what they are, but straight out of the perfect character of God—by a Jesus who, in the touch of His life upon us, brings on us the touch of God, who, by the pressure of His nature upon ours, sets God's very nature in place of ours. Through believing in, through surrender to, such a Jesus as that—and only thus—are we morally transformed, begotten of God.

So need we hesitate no longer to join in the apostle's exultant cry as the text records it—"Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth

that Jesus is the Son of God?" It is the glad outburst of his joy as he realises suddenly to what a sun-kissed peak his ascent of thought has led him. Following him in his climb, as we have sought to do, we may unite with him in his song. Look back upon the steps once more. We are to overcome: they who are begotten of God are they who can overcome: they who believe in the God-nature of Jesus, and surrender to it, are begotten of God—then of course the glad conclusion starts out, "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" And for one and all of us, the application and the lesson of it is this—to make our belief in Him who is the Son a richer thing, to thrust our nature deeper and deeper under His till His nature permeates and flows through ours, that so we may be divinely born, and attain that victory over the world which is the birthright of the God-born soul.

XV

CHRIST'S LOVE THE CONSTRUCTIVE FORCE IN LIFE

"And they sat and watched him there."—MATTHEW xxvii. 36.

THEY who represented the world's greatest Strength watched thus heedlessly beside Him who was the world's greatest Love. "They" were of course the soldiers of Rome, the representatives of the mighty empire before whose power all the world was going down, whose iron grip was closing upon nation after nation, and whose career of victory none could stay. And He whom they watched was of course the Christ around whose brief earthly course the grace and beauty of tender kindliness had shone, who had spent Himself in many a ministry of healing and whose whole life had been a ceaseless outpouring of love. But to the Roman soldiers the love which had been the impulse of all Christ's life and the spring of all His activities, was a thing of no account. Something of His marvellous tender-heartedness and grace they must have known, for the story of it must have been ringing so loudly through the city that even

through the difference of language some echoes of the tale must have reached their ears; but to them, all of kindness the Christ had done and all of healing His hands had wrought were but unimportant incidents with which they could have no manner of concern. Least of all could it enter into their thought that, as He hung upon the cross before them, His tenderness was holding even them in its embrace. What need of tenderness had they? Proud in their strength, satisfied with their strength, conscious that in them something of the Imperial power of Rome was gathered up—what had they to do with any gracious kindness He might have shown, with any yearning love for men that might have dwelt or that even now, in His agony, might still dwell, within His heart? It was all nothing to them. With the profound indifference of Strength to Love, they only "sat and watched him there."

Passing quite away in our minds, however, from the circumstances to which the text immediately refers, I want to think, not of the Roman soldiers and their indifference to the love before them, but rather of ourselves and of the indifference which we, in our times of conscious strength, allow ourselves to feel towards that love of Christ which, in our times of weakness, we know we need so much. While we are quick to confess, when through the pressure of sin or the sharp probing of sorrow the sickening sense of helplessness falls upon us, that all our refuge is in the tenderness of Christ, it might be said of us not seldom, when the sense of frailty has ceased to vex our souls and we are self-possessed in our strength,

that we forget our need of being loved. And it is of the mistake we make through not realising that we need Christ's tenderness as much in our times of conscious strength as in our times of oppressing weakness—it is of that mistake I want to think just now.

We seem possessed by the idea that what Christ's love is to do for us—and about all that Christ's love is to do for us—is to be the repairing and renewing influence for our lives. It is to be the solace of our souls when the world has disquieted us: it is the medicine that brings back the lost health of the spirit when the thousand ills whereby the spirit may be attacked have sapped the spirit's strength: it is the last and surest support whereon our lamed and helpless lives, as all other supports are found to fail, may confidently fall back and fearlessly lean. Of course the existence and reality of Christ's great love is always to us a fact set far beyond possibility of question: we carry with us, through all our changeful hours and our winding ways, the assurance that, come what may, that love at any rate will be waiting to receive and shelter us if all our resources should prove unequal to the strain life may bring; and we see, held ready to embrace us if the pressure of hostile circumstance or the threatenings of fate should frighten us into utter inability to do anything for ourselves, the arms of Him who is strong to save. But seldom is it realised that Christ's tenderness is to be the main supporting force of life even in the normal condition of things—when there are no

terrors, no insoluble difficulties, no threatening foes that make the heart tremble and the cheek blanch with fear. When the sense of strength pulses in us, when the step is light along an easy road, when all oppositions appear to have withdrawn and no enemies molest—then comes upon us too often the indifference which Strength is apt to feel for Love, and we think of and look upon the tenderness of the Christ as a thing afar off. It is still there, we know; and when the need recurs we shall fling ourselves upon it again, we know; but, for the time being, the power that lives in us puts us beyond the need of reclining upon the help it can afford. The love of Christ is taken to be our rest when we are weary, not the very inspiration by which we live when we are strong. It comes in to set things right for us when all has gone to chaos and disaster, but is not the influence wherein we live and move and have our being when no sign of danger presents itself and the sky is clear.

And we need to learn that Christ's love, and our resting upon it, is not only the compensation for the things wherein we fail, but the actual strength of all we have and are. His love set on us is the positive force that makes us: even when we think ourselves able to master our fate and to prove ourselves lords over the circumstances of life, it is only because Christ loves us that we can do so; and in our times of strength we need to be casting ourselves upon Christ's tenderness in order that the strength may be rightly used, just as truly as in our times of weakness we need to cast ourselves upon Christ's tenderness in order that the weakness may be relieved. It is not

that we need to be loved by Christ when all power is gone from us, and can do without His love—at any rate without so real and profound an experience of it—when power returns. When we think that we can manage life, make something out of life, control life, go straight ahead, so to say, through life—then do we still need to remember that it is only because the Christ loves us we can do these things; and only as we remember that shall we do them to the full. In the moments of felt power must we recognise that from the love of Christ set upon us does all the power come, and even then must we seek to yield ourselves to His love, knowing that by His love and by our yielding to it must all our life be built and made.

Now as concerns the mere statement, I suppose we should all agree so far. We should all confess in word, and the confession would have no hesitancy in it, that from the tenderness of our Lord and Master we must every moment draw our inspiration and our support. But how little we comprehend what is involved in allowing Christ's love to be the positive force that makes our life for us, and how little, as a matter of practice, we *do* allow it to be the positive force that makes our life for us! It means something more than carrying with us the knowledge and memory of Christ's love: to lean ourselves upon the graciousness of Christ is not simply to be reminding ourselves, ever and again, how great and how constant that graciousness is known to be: we are not letting Christ's tenderness *make* us if we, as it were, just pause every now and then in the midst of our life's

hurry to press upon our souls the sweetness of His grace. For, if that be the sum of our abandonment to the love of the Christ—that more or less frequent self-reminding of its reality and its greatness—it will be just when we need it most that the recollection may fail to return. When the pressure of care is heavy upon us, when varied anxieties make their tumult round about us, the mind may be too confused and distracted to remember then the love which precisely then it needs so sorely; and the effort to fling itself upon that tenderness which it has only now and again remembered may prove too much for its overtasked strength. So long as we only recur every now and then—be it never so frequently—to the knowledge and recollection of Christ's love toward us, we are but watching that love with something of indifference in the watching, and are not related to it as we ought to be. And to allow Christ's love to be the positive force that makes our life means something more, too, than praying for its help, be the prayer passionate and oft-repeated as it may. For the very idea of prayer somehow implies the idea of distance: the tenderness of Christ is not the very breath of our being, the very substance of our life, if we have to call and strain for it, to compel it across to us from a Christ who is outside our life. It is not the ideal relationship between our souls and the gracious affection of our soul's Lord, that our souls should have to wait, even though the delay were brief, for the advent of that affection, that they should have to call, even though it were with certainty that the calling will be heard, for that affection to be

bestowed. So long as we only connect ourselves with Christ's tenderness by the frequent supplication for its presence and its upholding, we are only watching that tenderness with something of separateness in the watching, and are not related to it as we ought to be. The remembrance of it, the prayer for it—all this is but using the tenderness of Christ as the reinforcement of life, the outside support of life, not allowing it to be the very positive force whereby our life is made.

But to let Christ's love really make us! Ah! it is that experience, I believe, that the Christian Church has been, half unconsciously, straining after for so long! So much of the unrest and unsatisfactoriness whereby the more thoughtful members of the Christian Church have been feeling themselves oppressed, has come just from this—though they may not have been able to interpret the oppression so—from the necessity of having the love and grace of Christ run through and pervade the whole of life as the all-enfolding and all-inspiring influence of it all, rather than be, as it so often has been, the occasional and additional influence brought into life for an infrequent hour. Life would be a great and rich thing if the love of Christ made it all, instead of only relieving and healing it in part. To let the love of Christ make us—how can I set into words what it means? It means that in the ordinary activities of our life—even in those matters which look, in the outward aspect of them, as if they had nothing at all to do with Christ and our relation to Him—even in these we are to do the things we do only because we

are yielding ourselves to Him who is the Lover of our souls, and because He, as His all-wise love takes hold of us, has lovingly inspired us to do them. To let the love of Christ make us—it means that we are to yield ourselves to Him who is the Lover of our souls so that He, in His all-wise love, may, so to say, have the employment, the use of us, that at every moment the mind may think and the voice may speak and the hands may move only because He lovingly makes His mind think through ours and His voice speak through ours and His hand move ours. To let the love of Christ make us—it means that we are to yield ourselves to Him who is the Lover of our souls so that from His all-wise love the initiative of our life, the beginning, the impulse, of everything may come. To let the love of Christ make us—it means—but do you remember how Browning's lover speaks to the one he loves? So, transferring the language to a higher relationship than the relationship of the highest human love can be, so should we speak ever to Him who is the Lover of our souls—

> "I would I could adopt your will,
> See with your eyes, and set my heart
> Beating by yours, and drink my fill
> At your soul's springs,—your part my part
> In life, for good and ill."

Only we should not need to add "for good and ill," since for the soul that is gripped in the great Lover-soul, ill there cannot be. But so to lean upon Christ's tenderness, to lose ourselves in it, to let it overflow us, to have every movement and thought and

word of our days come, not out of ourselves, but from out of the gracious affection that has hold of all we are—that is to let the love of Christ be the positive and actual force whereby our life is made.

I cannot make it clearer by multiplying words. But I want you to take the thought and hold it; for I say again that this is the thing which the Christian Church has been, half unconsciously, straining after for so long. I suppose that there could not be a more entire divorce than that which exists, even for Christian people, between the ordinary activities of life and the sense of Christ's tenderness: were one to ask any man, upon the ordinary round of business and duty, whether it be at the dictation and under the inspiration of the love of Christ that the business and the duty are discharged, he would scarce know what the enquiry meant: the dividing line is drawn, clear and sharp, sheer down between the common hours when we manage things for ourselves and the uncommon hours when Christ and His graciousness take up their sway. Yet I suppose, too, that never has there been so much talk (and a great deal of it to very little purpose) about the deeper spiritual life, larger blessings, and the like. And what it all comes to is this—if we could only see it—that we have been taking Christ's grace as the relieving and restoring and healing power for our life, but not as the constructive force by which all our life, down to the smallest details of it, is to be built and made. And we shall never, never enter into the deepest experiences of Christ's tenderness so. The deeper life is this, and nothing else than this—to let all our life

be the loving Christ translating Himself in the activities of our strength. In all, we are to be but children under the care of His love. In all, His love is not only to lift us up when we fall, but to prescribe the whole way. In all, we are to do the things we do only because we have abandoned ourselves to His love, and He, the Loving One, takes us and, through us, does these things so. In Christ's tenderness we are to live and move and have our being. Even though strength should seem to wake in us, and there be little apparent need of any love whereon to lean, His love is to be still the staff and the stay.

An impossible thing!—do you say? An impracticable ideal, is it? Not a light matter, I know. It is not always an easy thing to submit ourselves to be loved, to let all our life be shaped and fashioned by a tenderness which every moment bears us within its embrace. To take all our life from the gracious inspiration of Him who loves us—to bring ourselves to that is to subject ourselves to a discipline which we cannot always find an easy thing to endure. There is a selfishness which will not receive, you know, as well as a selfishness which will not give: there is a self-absorption which will not be loved, as well as a self-absorption which will not love. And to find that the secret of true and strong living is this—just to let Christ love us, and by the magnetic, uniting, absorbing power of His love make His life and ours one—to find that if we do let Christ love us and make us we have done all there is to do—that comes with something like a shock of surprise upon the soul. It seems to make such helpless children of us;

and we shrink from that. It means a real, positive effort for us thus to submit our hearts to the enfolding of a heart recognised as greater and stronger than our own. Yet that effort must be made; and, subduing every touch of reluctance to bring ourselves so low, suppressing all rising rebellion against having to accept, in humility, a higher love's ordaining, we have to set all we are—even the strength that is in us—at the disposal of the all-knowing and all-powerful love of our Lord.

And for my last word, let me bring home to you—in order that the effort thus to let Christ's tenderness mould and make all our life for us may be not quite so oppressing as at first it may appear to be—let me bring home to you how, by submitting life to the entire control of Christ's love, life, through this dependence, really grows to independence after all. I said it seems to make such helpless children of us; but it only seems. For by allowing the love that Christ has toward us to be the spring of all our living, we link ourselves directly with the source of all power: in Him who enfolds us with His tenderness dwells the might of empire over all worlds, of sovereignty over all things in heaven and earth; and as we fall back upon His grace, we are made kings and masters of our fate, because He is King and Master of all. To be moulded by His love, to have no thought or movement in life save what His love inspires, to drop our whole being down upon His love that waits to grip and grasp us—to do that is to make ourselves strong and supreme

as He is strong and supreme. Dependent upon Christ's affection, we are independent of all else: the soul that is moved only at the impulse of the Christ who loves it is the soul that can face the world without prick of fear: ringed round by our Lord and Saviour's tenderness, we may stand up in confidence, knowing that nothing of harm or evil can ever pass that barrier by. From being controlled by the loving Lord, comes assurance to us that we can control whatever of threatening circumstance or apparently adverse fate the world may fling against our safely-sheltered life. If every thought and act and word of ours be the result of our drinking-in of Christ's tenderness—if they be Christ's tenderness working itself out, manifesting itself, through us—then every thought and act and word of ours will be calmly confident and strong, stamped with the mark of His royalty from whose gracious inspiration it has come. To be masters of our fate, to stand in unquestioned supremacy over the ebb and flow of circumstance, to gaze out with utter calmness and quietude upon all the changes of the tumultuous present and upon all the possibilities of the uncertain future, to control our own life, let us first turn away from it all and hide ourselves—as much when we feel strong and self-sufficient for it all as when we faint with weakness and despair amid it all—in the love of the Christ.

Do not think, I ask you, that these experiences of which I speak are shadowy and unsubstantial, impossible in a world made and ordered as is ours.

Sure I am that we shall find our forward progress made easy to us when we no more keep the consciousness of our Master's grace in the background of our life as the refuge to flee to when all else fails, but let it be the positive force, the actual impelling power, of all we are and do. Sure I am that the thing we, who are disciples of Christ, most truly need is to realise that the Christ's love is not the medicine to heal us when the soul is sick nor the staff to lean on when the footsteps falter, but rather the breath—the very breath—of all our days, the all-pervading atmosphere apart from which no true life can be. Let us not, when strength is in us, only watch the grace and affection of the Christ as if from far away, but remember even then that only by reclining upon His love may the strength be rightly and purposefully employed. May we be, and rejoice to be, disciples who, not only in the exceptional hours of life, but in life's every hour, are disciples whom Jesus loves and who live by His love, disciples who, even though for a moment they should feel strong enough to leave Him, are still content to lean upon His breast.

XVI

THE CHRISTIAN'S SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE WORLD

"For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."—1 CORINTHIANS iii. 21–23.

THE chapter of which this passage forms the conclusion illustrates how Paul was able to pass from things local and temporary to the utterance of great and lasting principles. He is primarily concerned in the chapter with the petty quarrels that had broken out in the Corinthian church, the members of it having split up into factions, each one of which called itself by the name of its own particular spiritual leader; and the apostle here seeks to make them realise the foolishness of their quarrelling by showing them how infinitely small are the things over which they quarrel compared with the greater interests which they neglect. He reminds them that they are a temple of God, and hints that the fact of their being a temple of God is of far larger importance for them than the question whether they call themselves followers of Paul or Apollos or Peter. "Know ye

not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" And yet, when you have been called to so noble a destiny as this of being dwelling-places for God Himself, you are wasting your time and degrading yourselves by these contemptible disagreements over the master to whom you owe completest allegiance! And then, as though he would reduce to utter absurdity the conduct of these men and women who had so far forgotten the greatness and nobleness of their calling, he utters this large principle expressed in our text, "All things are yours." Here were these Corinthians disputing among themselves, "I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos"—and Paul seems to laugh at them as he says, Why, all things are yours! They were quarrelling about the part when they might all of them possess the whole. It was their privilege to take from all men and from all things whatever of good men or things had to bestow: all the world, past, present, and future, lay stretched before them for their use and service: they were, or might be, monarchs and rulers of it all. "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." Thus, urged to it by the spectacle of the Corinthian Christians looking so low when they might range so high, kindled by the folly of these people who disputed over the little things when God invited them to possess all things, the apostle utters this great and far-reaching principle of the Christian's sovereignty over the world. "All things are yours."

And it is of that great principle, which holds good for us as for the Corinthians to whom Paul first enunciated it, that I wish to think just now.

"All things are yours." When we are Christ's, we are to look out on the world as being its kings and masters, to take it and all that is in it as having something to do for us, to use it and make it serve us. All the processes of human life and experience, all the movements that go on around us, all that makes up the environment by which we are encompassed—all these things are ours, and we are to look forth upon them as being meant in some way for our help and service. Now it has often happened that men of thoughtful and not wholly irreligious spirit have looked quite otherwise on this world in which they have been compelled to live, gazed on it as though it had nothing for them and were indeed altogether hostile to the highest interests of their best life. Sometimes they have tried, as it were, to hold their earthly surroundings at a distance from them, to ignore and forget them so far as possible: when success came to them, they refused to rejoice, and when trial came, they refused to mourn; and the true method of life, they have held, was to dissociate yourself as completely as the weakness of human nature will permit from all the exterior circumstances and processes of your life, because, in so far as you allow them to influence you at all, they can only harm. But Paul says, "All things are yours." Then sometimes it has happened that others, feeling it impossible thus to hold aloof from

life's surroundings and to ignore their power, have, while recognising the fact, regretted it, and declared sadly that true blessedness is inaccessible to those compelled to make this world their home. The best hope our hearts can entertain, it has seemed to them, is the hope of a speedy escape from a world which has nothing good in it and which can minister nothing to help us. Stoic and pessimist alike have said that the world has no message or service for man. But Paul says, "All things are yours." He has no sympathy with morbid and depressed and unhealthy ways of looking at life: he does not look at the world as if it were the devil's world instead of God's; but, surveying cheerfully and with courage the whole field of human life and experience, he tells us that it is all others, if only we be ourselves Christ's.

We are to realise our sovereignty, then. From all that has been and from all that is, in our own life and in the lives of others so far as we see and understand them, in past history, in present movements of thought and activity—from all these things, from every element in human life that presents itself to our notice, we are to get something, to learn some lesson, to extract something that we can incorporate into ourselves and grow by. All things are ours. Our life in the world brings us many an alternation of peace and distress, rejoicing and pain, gladness and tears; and these joys and these sorrows are not just *things that happen to us*, that come and go and are done with—they are ours in the sense that in them lies hidden something we ought to keep for ever. They teach some lesson, hold some principle:

they are an abiding possession for us: they are ours. Our life in the world sets us into contact with many another life than our own; and out of what we see in our brethren's life and experience, out of what they go through, out of their struggles and successes and failures, comes some clear voice to us, if we can only hear, to teach and help us. These things are ours: we are to take their lesson, to heed their warning, to discern and take to ourselves their meaning. Our life in the world makes us the inheritors of a long history that lies behind; and that is not merely something to be read about and wondered over as it tells us of man's frequent glory and man's as frequent shame. It is ours, because through all the processes of history great principles of right and truth have been emerging, which we are to note and remember and live by. The world's past has been God's revelation of Himself; and that revelation is ours; and we are to take it as the foundation whereon we build. Our life in the world flings us into the midst of societies and communities and many organised relationships: on every hand are movements of thought and developments of social order and attempts, at any rate, at improvement along the whole line of our common life; and all this is ours because, out of man's present struggle after something better—just as out of the history of man's past struggle for what he is—there emerge into clearness great principles of life and conduct which we are to mark and appropriate to ourselves. Even when our life in the world makes us stand, as it so often does, face to face with mistakes and sins—if in ourselves or

in others or in history or in society we are confronted by failure and wrong—still these very wrongs are ours, in that they speak in warning though they have no other message, and are as danger-signals to bid us watch. Thus Paul tells us we are to look out on the great world. "All things are yours; whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours." And so we live a full life, and grow on all sides, taking from this and that, from every element that goes to make up our environment, whatever it has to give. We are not just to *pass through* the world, as it were with averted gaze, but to look anxiously for what treasure of wisdom it may yield to us. We are not to be bound to the world—no, but the world is to be bound in service to us: we are to stand above it as its masters: we are to use it and rule it and have it lying at our feet. "All things are yours."

But we miss very often this buoyancy of spirit. We do not face life with this cheerfulness. We do not realise our ownership, our sovereignty. We too frequently seem to think that God stops short at making the world just tolerable for us, and does nothing more. We talk about "the weary weight of all this unintelligible world," and then we fall back wearily upon our Father's love, which somehow, we with difficulty force ourselves to believe, will get us through. Ah! our Father's love has done more for us than that! It has crowned us and made us kings. He never puts us into the world that the world may half spoil and half crush us, and that He may then come in to repair and correct what it has done. Of

course we very often let the world half spoil and half crush us, but it is our own fault. Our God so ordains our ways, depend upon it, that, if we bear ourselves rightly, our life and everything that makes up our life shall concentrate itself upon our inmost being and help and serve us. He bids us recollect that we are lords over all, that all things are ours.

If then we be Christ's, let us rise to this height. All things are ours. All the world is at our feet.

Turn now to the condition on which this sovereignty is ours. It is ours if we are ourselves Christ's, and only so far as we are Christ's. "All things are yours; and ye are Christ's"—as though the apostle, in telling the Corinthians that all things were theirs, felt that he was saying a great thing and must support it at once with an adequate reason. "It is because you are Christ's that all things are yours; and this great principle holds true for you only in so far as you really are His."

It is our relationship to Christ, then, that enables us to realise our kingship over the world and to enter into the privileges of it: it is as we keep ourselves bound to Christ that life, with all that goes to make it up, yields its meaning and service to us: it is because we are the Christ's slaves in heart and thought and feeling, and only when we are His slaves in heart and thought and feeling, that we rule all things else. Our closeness to Him gives us, so to say, the infallible key with which we can unlock the secrecies of our life and find their hidden treasures. And we need it. I fancy that sometimes, as we face

our life with all its complications and intricacies and bewilderments, we might say something like this: "The apostle tells us that all things are ours, that we are to find some use and help in it all; but how are we to ascertain the meaning of this thing or of that? The world is so great a riddle to our poor understanding, so hard to interpret. How are we to make it really ours and compel it to assist us?" But this is the answer—"ye are Christ's." It is when our relation with Christ is a real thing to us, when He stands as a real presence with us, that life's riddles are read and life's interpretations made clear. Whenever our experience brings upon us some mystery whose significance we cannot see, and we don't know what it is meant to teach us or how it is to minister to us, we have but to think of Christ and to behold the vision of Him, and at once we see right into the heart of that mystery and fathom its secret. The moment we bring our relation with Him to bear on life, the moment we are truly His, the moment we call Him in to interpret for us, the lesson of everything is clear. It is a thing proved true by experience beyond every possible doubt—that in Christ, and in our realisation of His reality and His presence, lies the key to all the world for us. Just as on the paper written over with invisible ink there will appear no message to the casual glance, so at first it may seem that many an incident of our life has nothing to tell. But hold that blank page to the fire's heat, and the unseen writing starts out into prominence. And so when in thought we carry our mysterious experience to Christ, the meaning of it

flashes out upon us, and we discern what it was designed to teach. The Christ holds the key to life, is Himself the key to life; and as we are *His*, in very truth *His*—as our relation with Him is close and intimate, and as we read life in the light of that relation—all things are ours.

Whenever the world and our life in it gets too much for us and threatens to overwhelm us, it is because for the time being we are not fully Christ's. Ah! how miserably we all fail just here! We take our joys, and forget to let Christ interpret their meaning for us, so that they do not do for us what they were meant to do. We take our sorrows, and, appalled at the blackness of them and occupied with our fears that they will crush us, we forget to realise our relation with Christ and to turn to Him that the glory of His presence may light up the sorrow's inmost significance for us; and so the sorrow beats us down into bitterness and gloom instead of ministering to us. We are not His: we have forgotten that we are His. We did not let His relation to us and ours to Him throw the flood of its light upon that passing experience, else we should have used it and ruled it and had it for our service beneath our feet.

There used to be some children's story of a traveller who carried with him on his journeyings a magic wand, with which he had but to touch any obstacle that presented itself in his path to make it disappear. Mountains were levelled and streams dried up and roughnesses made smooth as the traveller's wand was laid on them. And so in our relationship with Christ—in the fact, when it is really a living

fact to us, that we are *His*—we have an all-powerful magic wand at whose touch everything must go down before us. I come suddenly in my journeyings to some great mountain of difficulty which I know my unaided strength will never surmount; but I touch the frowning difficulties with the magic wand of my relationship with Christ, and straightway I see how the seeming difficulty may be turned into my real help. I come to some deep and darkly-running stream of sorrow which would sweep away my life if I tried alone to ford it; but I touch the crushing sorrow with the magic wand of my relation to Christ, and at once out of the sorrow's blackness emerges some secret of grace. I come here and there upon some rough path of haunting anxieties and fretting cares which, if I meet them alone, will toss my helpless soul about in restlessness and pain; but I touch the anxious cares with the magic wand of my relation to the Christ, and immediately I understand how these unlovely anxieties may be made to help my heart towards its true rest. He, the Christ, brings help out of hindrances and peace out of griefs and sweetness out of care and restfulness out of pain: my relation with Him is the magic wand which commands a clear path for me when all ways are closed: it has in it the subtle chemistry which transmutes all things into gold.

And then the apostle goes on to give the guarantee that in thus interpreting life by the Christ-key we can make no mistake. "Read your life as your relation to the Christ explains it to you, and you must read it

rightly, for Christ is God's." In looking at our life and experience as Christ helps us to look at it, we are getting at the ultimate, divine meaning and intention of it: when we take our griefs and trials to Christ and let His light transfigure them into sweet significance for us, we are not giving way to a sentiment which may have some passing consolation for us but is not firmly founded; for Christ is God's. The meaning which He gives to the world for us is the meaning which the God who made it and to whom it belongs intended it to bear. Some one may say, "I stand outside your Christian interpretations of life, but I use life nevertheless. I may make my experience help and teach me. It means something to me, and does something for me." Yes, without holding the Christ-key we may get some meaning out of our life, but we cannot be sure of getting the *best* meaning out of it. We can have no certainty that we are making the right use of it. But if Christ interprets it for us, there can be no error, for Christ is God's. He has the last authority. He is, so to say, the ultimate, highest court of appeal. As He reads our life for us, so God reads it: the Christ-explanation of life bears the sign and seal of God.

We have no need to be apologetic about taking our understanding of things from Christ and looking at all things in His light. It is in all strictness the only and altogether reasonable thing to do. We sometimes almost appear to think that when our experience is a riddle to us and we call up the vision of Christ and turn to Him to make it clear—we almost appear to fancy that it is a sort of weakness which needs

justification. Oh! but there is such comfort in it, we say. Yes, but that would not be worth very much if we could not say something more. This is the last justification of our reliance on Him, the final word which silences all hesitancies and questionings about it, the rock-firm ground on which we stand—that Christ is God's! And I know, when I hide myself away from the mysteries and oppressions and sadnesses of life in Him, and He sets me in His grace and glory as lord over them all—I know that it is no passing delusion from which some day a rude awakening must come, but that I see right through to the heart of things as God Himself ordained them, for Christ is God's. All things are ours when we take our sovereignty over them from the hand of the Christ; because as He sets us on our thrones, God Himself through Him makes the crowning and the kingship sure.

It is our privilege, then, to go out into the world with Him as ever-present interpreter, for He has all the secrets and will tell them to those who listen for His word. Out of all the confusions and sorrows and discords He will bring a meaning and a sweetness and a music for us: He will put the magic wand, the sceptre of our sovereignty, into our grasp: He will give us the kingdom. Oh! we are too much like down-trodden slaves, while He holds out to us the charter of freedom and lordship. Well may we bid our souls be of good cheer and our courage waken and our downcast hearts arise; for ever at the side of those who look for Him is He who says, "I have overcome the world, and I deliver it to you. Through Me all things are yours."

XVII

LIFE AT FAR RANGES

"Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold a far-stretching land."—ISAIAH XXX. 17.

THOUGH the words are familiar, yet their first and immediate meaning is often unknown or forgotten. We use them of Heaven very frequently, and of course they may be legitimately so applied; but the prophet, when he spoke them, had something else in view. They were uttered at the time when Jerusalem was in the dire agony of the Assyrian siege, when Hezekiah and the people of the city were fast imprisoned within the invader's grip. Turn where they would, they would be faced by the sight of the hostile army's tents surrounding Jerusalem: the horror of it would so engross them that they would be able to see or think of nothing else; and the loveliness which might lie beyond the beleaguered city, the wide expanses, the far-stretching lands, would be for them as though they did not exist. They would have no far views. And then the prophet speaks to them of the coming day of deliver-

ance when the sense of narrowness and restriction which was choking the breath out of them should be removed : freedom and greatness and breadth of life would be theirs once more ; and they would be brought out of their prison-house to find the far-stretching lands spread before them again. Then their eyes should see the king in his beauty—not, as he was now, with his royal state and power restricted and made nothing—but with the beauty and glory and greatness of his kingship brought back. Then they should behold a far-stretching land, or, as the marginal rendering gives it, "a land of far distances." It would be as though vast plains and distant mountain-ranges and wide stretches of field and hill and valley were spread before them : they might look upon them and know that they were theirs ; and the feeling of exhilaration and buoyancy and new largeness of life was to bound within their hearts.

And so we may take the prophet's words as a summons to us to escape from the imprisonment we so often suffer—the imprisonment within the things that are nearest and most immediate—and to live a live that has far views, a life at far ranges, to live with the consciousness of eternity upon us and with the knowledge that we belong to it. It is a call to live with the gaze fixed on God, so that the nearest things of our life, the little incidents and circumstances of our days, may be lit up and interpreted in the light of the God on whom our thought and glance are ever set. Live with the thought of God always dominant. Live as though seeing Him who is invisible. Let

your glance rest, not on the things that are nearest, but on God—so does life grow great and free.

Will you think, first, on our frequent concentration upon what is near, how we make our lives narrow and constrained by giving all our attention to the immediate things; and then next, upon the waking from that concentration which comes to us, the stirring of the desire for a freer and larger life; and then last, upon how, by fixing thought and gaze on God, beholding the King in His beauty, the freer and larger life is attained.

First, our concentration upon, our absorption in, the things that are nearest. It is the tendency of all of us to take short and narrow views, to look upon the thing which is passing *just now* as being so all-important in itself, to forget that only in looking upon God and thinking upon God and remembering we are God's do we get the one all-including master-idea which interprets our life for us and brings freedom and greatness. Like the citizens of Jerusalem, shut in by the armies gathered round the city walls, we are shut in within our immediate circumstances—imprisoned, as they were (only in our case it is our own fault) by the nearest joys and sorrows and hopes and disappointments of our lot. We are so short-sighted. We look on some gladness which for the passing moment has been given to us, and we let our hearts grow absorbed in it and take the sweetness of it, but we do not think of looking past the gladness to God. Yet, if we did, we might find that He would interpret the innermost meaning of the passing joy

to us, show us how it is to help and bless us far more than we had thought. Or we look on some grief which visits us, and we brood over it and think about it as though there were nothing else in all the world to think about, and make it ten times worse by all our brooding and thinking—but we do not look past the grief to God. Yet, if we did, we might find that He would interpret the innermost meaning of the passing grief to us, show us how it works into the plan and purpose of our days. That is how we all so often live. Each thing as it comes fills up the whole field for us: so bound are we to that which is nearest, that when things go wrong with us, our little misfortune has swept God out of the universe for us; and we so seldom raise our thought from this joy and that sorrow and this success and that failure to see if, as we gaze further and look upon God, there might not be revealed to us the secret which would make out of all these disconnected experiences of ours one great and glorious whole.

And it is imprisonment indeed. We cannot rightly understand things so: our life can never have the greatest meanings for us while our view of it is so narrowed and fragmentary. It is like reading a book and, because the brain is wearied, looking upon one word of it after another as the words come before our eyes, but having no comprehension of the one binding and informing thought that lies behind it all. So do we look upon this thing and that, this succession of incidents, some little and some great, which comes to us and passes away, but we are shut up within the incidents themselves, and do not look through them

and beyond them to catch in that larger vision the innermost secret that explains them every one. Yet, if our life be a discipline for us at all, as we are taught to hold it is, we can never learn its lessons until we have got hold of some master-fact, some master-idea, in the light of which we can interpret it. Unless we behold ever before us one great, all-including, all-embracing thought, and can say, "Now in the light of this thought I am to read my life and all my life's contents and all my life's experiences"—unless we can do that, our life will seem to bring us to door after door locked and barred, for whose opening we have neither talisman nor key. The King in His beauty!—not in the constant glory of that far vision do we live, else we should not think so sadly or so long over this worry and that loss. We should know what it meant, and beside the thought of the King it would not be worth thinking about. The far-stretching land!—not as though we had caught a glimpse of life's ever-heightening ascent, seen some great and glorious stretch of destiny ahead of us and known that it is all ours, not so do our days go on, else the little things would not bulk so largely in our thought and fear. They would be forgotten in the further, wider view. No, we are shut in and imprisoned, with the little joys and sorrows bounding our outlook as though they were some besieging army round our life's citadel, forbidding us to pass beyond: we have no master-fact, no great master-thought: we take narrow and constrained views. And so we ourselves are liable, so sadly liable, to grow smaller and meaner, to become narrow our-

selves as we have narrowed our outlook and our thought, to fail in making out of our life a constant progress toward richness and enlargement and greatness of soul.

I wonder whether we shall ever make it our constant habit to keep the gaze fixed far out upon the things that are infinitely greater than the things that lie nearest to us, to look ever for the King and the far-stretching land, and just to let the glory come down from them upon these little things over which we spend so much anxiety, and for which we bring on ourselves so many an heartache—just to let the glory come down from the vision of the King and the far-stretching land upon these things, and reveal their meaning to us. Some one once said to me, "After all, this whole life, with all we suffer and all we lose in it, is a very small affair compared with the greater issues of our being." And that is the spirit with which we want to face our days. To really feel that is to behold the King in His beauty and the far-stretching land, and to be delivered from our narrowness and imprisonment. To be deeply conscious that round about the fragmentary and apparently disjointed things that happen to us there is the binding chain of some great destiny we are to fulfil—and to fix our thought upon *that* and our gaze upon *that* instead of upon the fragmentary and disjointed experiences themselves—that is the larger, freer life We shall never make anything out of this succession of joys and sorrows, this ceaseless round of changing experience, this whirl of life and that sad quietude of death—we shall never make anything out of it all—

it will never yield its secret—till we look past it all to God, and then, with the thrill of beholding Him upon us, turn back to gaze upon our life again. Look first upon your own life, and you will not be able to raise your eyes from it to the vision of the King; but look first for Him, and His glory will transfigure your life. We take short and narrow views. We do not look beyond the immediate and nearest. For our life we have no master-key.

Then a word or two about the wakening from that concentration on the nearest things, the wakening which sometimes comes to us, the stirring of a desire for a freer and larger life.

I suppose that to all of us there comes at times the consciousness (and there is strange mingling of joy and sadness in it) the consciousness that our life cramps us—the feeling that there is in us something which is not finding adequate room and scope under the conditions of our existence—the sense of faculties that cannot get play—the dim, yet unmistakable apprehension of some greater possibilities in us that have not emerged, and are, as it were, choked back whenever they seek to make themselves felt. It is what Wordsworth meant when he said "we feel that we are greater than we know." In spite of all our absorption in the thing that is passing just now, notwithstanding the hold which the immediate and near incident of our experience gets upon us, although the joy or sorrow of the present hour so often fills up all the world for us—yet has not the heart of you sometimes risen up as though in rebellion against it all,

and in the furthest depths of your soul has it not been as though some voice told you that you are too great to be pulled down into and drowned in these mad currents and whirlpools of circumstance? "There is something in me," our inmost consciousness runs, "there is something in me, after all, which these things cannot touch or ought not to touch. There is some great meaning in my life which these chances and changes would be powerless to obscure, if I could only get hold of it. There is some great destiny waiting for my life which must remain unaffected by these things—or rather, which must be helped on and helped out by these things; and I want to know what it is." And so often there are within us the stirrings, sometimes faint, sometimes stronger, sometimes overmastering, in the moments of the soul's keenest sensitiveness—the stirrings of a possible greatness for which we know we were made: we rise up from our concentration upon and our absorption in the nearest and immediate things, and look for some grander visions to dawn upon us: the new assurance comes that life means more than appears, is ringed round by vaster possibilities, turned to greater and grander ends, destined to more transcendent consummations, than we have ever understood. This joy has been given; but there is something stirring within us which makes us feel that it is after all a very little thing. This sorrow has descended; but there is something stirring within us which makes us feel that after all it ought not to count for very much. This and that and the other thing has always seemed to be against us; but in

those hours of awakening and sensitiveness the heart passionately refuses to be borne down and crushed under, though the whole world should seem to declare war. "Spite of all these things that crowd round and beset me, I was made for something worthy"—so the inner voice protests. And we long—just as the citizens of the oppressed city must have longed in the bitterness of the siege for the freedom and for the purer air and for the expanded life from which they were shut away—we long for a larger life and a freer, knowing that we might and ought to live it, even though hitherto we have been unable to enter in. It is the deepest, truest heart of us straining after the vision of the King in His beauty, yearning to behold the far-stretching land. This life, cramped in by, concentrated upon, the immediate and near, is not enough for us: we want something more.

And it is wrong to scorn this consciousness of possible greatness, or to dismiss it as an idle sentiment of no worth. It is, I am certain, the very call of God to us. He thus first makes us restless, that He may afterwards lead us into the restfulness of a life which for ever beholds Him and looks upon His face. You will never know the sweet helpfulness of the promise that your eyes *shall* see the King in His beauty and behold the far-stretching land, unless you have chafed against your imprisonment. And in that sense of unrest, of powers that find no scope, of being cramped—in that beating of futile wings against the cage-bars behind which we are restrained—God says to us, "You have been looking down always, seeing the nearest things only, taking no far

views, living by no great thought and with no master-key. Now look upward to me, and as you seek to behold the King, and as the vision of Him dawns, and as you live in the downpouring of His glory upon you, that unrest will pass. For your restraint you will have uttermost freedom, and you will know the greatness which in hours of insight your spirit feebly gropes for now." Our sense of imprisonment and constraint is God's call to us to rise up and be free.

Then, last, we attain to freedom and largeness of life by fixing gaze and thought upon God, reminding ourselves always that we belong to Him, and that in Him our life finds its highest meaning, its glorious destiny. "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold a far-stretching land." And when we take that promise to ourselves and endeavour to realise it for ourselves—when we try to catch the vision of God, and seem to behold our life, in all the ups and downs of it, tending across the far distances to Him and reaching up to Him at last—then are we great and free, and our existence is delivered out of all its imprisonments, brought forth into conscious liberty and greatness. God comes to us and speaks to us, "You want a greatness and breadth of life that is beyond your reach: your heart pants and yearns after some richness of being you have not attained. Well, this is the promise to you, that you belong to the King and shall see Him some day in all His glory. Then live in the light of that promise, and strive to see Him now! Your life

does tend on over the distances to Him. Then live with that glorious truth of your destiny ever burning above you, and already you may see how the process of your experience presses on, spite of all seeming obstruction and deviousness, to take you to God." The thought of God, the vision of God, the constant assurance that we belong to Him, is to be the master-idea which unlocks the doors for us and lets us forth into freedom. And without fail it does so. How the consciousness that we are God's, that we are here from God, that we go to God, the certainty that our life is held in the hollow of His hand, the bright vision of Him—how this makes nothing of all other things! I feel, as one experience succeeds another, as sorrow follows gladness and gladness returns again after sorrow, that these things cannot and ought not to fill up my nature, and I want to shake myself free from the bondage and trammels of them and escape; and, if I can see the King in His beauty and know that I belong to Him, what does joy or sorrow either matter to me then? As I see Him, I enter into something of His own greatness. Or I feel the presence of possibilities and powers within me that find no scope, am dimly conscious with the poet that I am greater than I know; and, if I can lift up my eyes and see the King in His beauty, and know that I belong to Him, straightway I know that in that relation of my life to His is the secret meaning of it all, and that already in anticipation I enter into, and at last in truth shall enter into, something of His own greatness. Why, with this as with so many other great

facts which would be our life's redemption if we grasped them, the very commonplaceness and familiarity of it robs it of its power for us. We know that we belong to God, but we look from our life to God, and the dimness that has come upon our sight as we looked on life with its mystery prevents us from really seeing Him as we might; and so, although we know ourselves to be His, the knowledge loses its inspiration for us. Rather look first to God, and bid your trembling heart be sure that you are His: then from Him look back to your life, and you will see the reflected glory upon it that will make it great. Gaze ever upon the God who is so far off, yet so nigh: live in the thought of Him, live in the vision of Him—let the recollection that you are His be, so to say, the uppermost thing in your consciousness—so shall you be free! We are free from the influence of that which is nearest and immediate, when we look steadfastly upon that which is beyond, upon God. Though the circumstances and joys and sorrows of our days should close around us to shut us in, force themselves upon us as though to bind and chain us, yet we shake them all from us and stand up in glad liberty and largeness of life, so soon as in confidence we can say, "I look beyond them all to see the King in His beauty, and know that I am His —I behold the far-stretching lands, and know that I tread across their distances to God."

God wants us to be sure that we are His. Believe in the instinct He has implanted in us which tells us that we shall reach to His greatness at last. Believe that some day it shall be to you as though the

curtain were suddenly drawn and the unveiled Presence revealed; and then live in the inspiration of that surpassing belief! If only the promise of our God, and the assurance of our own future greatness it gives, be written on our hearts—"thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold a far-stretching land"—and if we live in the power of it, so already are we lifted above our joys and our sadnesses and our life and our death, carried over in the innermost life of us to the Eternal God, sharing His greatness, brought out into a large place. Not only may we share the poet's vague sense of something better to be, and "feel that we are greater than we know." With more assured accents may we speak as we look to and live beneath the vision of our King. Already may we lay our hand on the gate that opens into the highest Heaven, already feel beating within us "the power of an endless life."

Let the prophet's word ring out to us as a call to lift up our hearts, to take far views, to escape from imprisonment to freedom. "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold a far-stretching land." Even now may our eyes be opened, and the vision come.

XVIII

HOW DISCIPLESHIP MADE PAUL VIEW LIFE

"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."—PHILIPPIANS i. 21.

As Paul writes these early verses of the epistle to the Philippians, he looks at living and dying in a manner curiously different from the manner in which we usually look at them. Here is a man who clings to life, not, as we so often do, because life seems pleasanter than death, but just because it seems harder than death. And here is a man who shrinks from death, not as we so often do, because there is any terror in it, but just because he loves it so well. Living is hardship and imprisonment and pain, a burden that weighs with crushing heaviness on the apostle's soul; but since the very hardship and imprisonment and pain tell somehow on behalf of Christ and Christ's gospel, he wants to carry the burden of life a little longer. Dying would be gain and happiness and release; but just because it would be these things, he cannot be selfish enough to long to die. To live was for Paul harder than to die; but for Christ's

sake he turns away from the joy of dying, and takes up the load of his painful life again.

For the key-idea of Paul's view of life was this—he looked on every circumstance of his experience, not as it affected himself, but as it affected the cause and gospel of his Master. "To me to live is Christ." "The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel"—and one can imagine how there was a smile on his face as he wrote a little further on, "and therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." For himself he did not care about living: his life meant nothing that was worth having to himself: to die would be gain. But for his Lord he did care about living: his life did mean something to Christ and to the gospel of Christ; and so he clung to it still.

I want to think for a while of what discipleship had made life to be to Paul, so that we may see whether we, who serve Paul's Master, have been brought by our discipleship to view life as Paul viewed it. Discipleship had first made him lose interest in the outward circumstances of his life, because they really mattered nothing in themselves: then discipleship had made him find a new interest in the outward circumstances of his life again, because his faithful living through them did matter so much to Christ—"to me to live is Christ"; and then discipleship had made him possess more than an interest in life, had made him possess an enthusiasm for life, because to live was Christ, so that, although dying might be gain, he did not want to die. We are to lose the interest in life that is an interest merely selfish: we

are to find a new interest in life for Christ's sake: nay, more than that, we are to possess an enthusiasm for life, a love of life, because our living tells in Christ's cause.

I say that first of all Paul's discipleship had made him lose his old interest in the outward circumstances of his life, because they really mattered nothing in themselves. You cannot read this chapter without noticing how the apostle's entire indifference to all external things comes out: so far as he himself personally was concerned, he had no care whether he were bond or free, whether he were condemned or praised, whether he lived or died; and so utterly has he dissociated himself from the exterior processes and circumstances of his own life, that he appears to survey it as a spectator from the outside, recking little how the drama of it might be carried through. He had other interests: other things filled his heart. Imprisonment and pain and hardship and life and death might come or go as they would: Paul stood aloof from all these things, and threw all his thought and interest, not into the life which was his own, but into the gospel which was Christ's.

And that is the first thing in the view of life which our Christian discipleship should inspire. It is not everything, let me be careful to say, and we shall see that directly; but it is the first thing. Christianity should release us from the absorbed interest in and from the constant watching of the details of our outward life, should teach us as its earliest lesson the worthlessness and unimportance of outward circumstances,

since they really matter nothing to us after all. When we are Christ's, we are to be carried by our Christian discipleship as it were out of ourselves and up from ourselves to some vantage-point where we cease to look upon ourselves or to think about ourselves, and where our Master and our Lord absorbs all the interest of mind and heart and soul into Himself. To the disciple who relates himself to life rightly, sorrow may come as it came to Paul, and he will hardly mark its coming, for his interest is in Christ: duty may present itself, and without feeling any heaviness in it or noting that it makes him weary, he will do it, for his interest is in Christ: whether he live or whether he die is a question that will not weigh with straining pressure on heart and brain, for living and dying will be the same to him, since his interest is in Christ. To stand, so to say, outside our own life, caring not for its chances and its change, since elsewhere, in the Christ to whom we belong, our whole souls are centred and fixed for all time.

But this very first point in the true disciple's view of life is a point we often fail to realise. What is the first thing we expect Christ to do with our life for us, when we become His? We expect Him — do we not?—to change the way in which circumstances affect us, to turn our sorrow into joy, to take the sting from our pain, to work some miracle by which all our life's imprisonments shall be changed to freedom and all our life's shadows transformed to gold. *That* is what we look for from Him, and He must do *that* on our behalf, else we are disappointed in our

discipleship, and complain sadly that we have not found in it the peace and joy we hoped to find. Yet that is not the first thing that our discipleship is to do for us. First of all comes this—the removal of all our thought and interest from the sorrows and the pains and the imprisonments and the shadows, so that we worry ourselves about them no more. Has He not promised that He will make all things to work together for our good? Yes, and He will keep His promise, but we are not to trouble ourselves about that. For us to live is to be Christ, and these other things we are to let be. Is it not said that through this seemingly chaotic muddle of joys and griefs and duties and pleasures and hopes and fears and successes and failures—that through it all He threads some beneficent purpose for His own? Yes, and He does it, but that is not our concern. For us to live is to be Christ: our discipleship to Him is to be the outstanding thing in our life, and these other things we are to let be. Let the joys and griefs come and go, discharge the duties and partake so far as may be of the pleasures, let the hopes be fulfilled or the disappointments visit you, succeed or fail—but stand outside it all as one whose interest and care is not in any of these things, but in the Christ, and in the discipleship to Him you profess, and in the allegiance to Him you owe, and in the grace and glory of Him that have won your heart. We so often look for the wrong miracle from Christ: we want Him to work the magic transformation which turns all life's darkness into glory, all life's evil into good. And He will do that: most un-

failingly will He do it; but not while that is the thing we most intently desire and look for at His hand. We are to leave it all: we are to wrap up our hearts in Him: first and foremost we are to let the outward concerns of our life go, since we have found other and nobler interests in our Lord.

To be indifferent to the circumstances of life because Christ absorbs us: to have no room in our hearts for anxiety or careful thought about them because Christ fills our hearts—that is it. It is not the indifference of stoicism, the indifference which does not trouble itself about life because life cannot be controlled, and all the troubling about it does no good—it is not that. And it is not the indifference of despair, the indifference which gives up caring about life because life seems all bad—it is not that. But it is the indifference to outward circumstances which says, "These things cease to trouble me, because on far other things my heart is fixed. For me to live is Christ, and all else drops into insignificance and fades away beside that all-absorbing thought." Our hearts are to be so full of Christ and the ardour of Christly service and the enthusiasm of Christ's gospel, that concern for the external circumstances and chances of our life can find no place. And that is the first point in the Christian view of life. "I leave all this: it is not my concern. Let the outward courses of my life shape themselves as they may. For me to live is Christ, and Christ is all."

But then I say, next that discipleship, after it had

thus made Paul lose interest in the outward circumstances of life, because they really mattered nothing in themselves, made him find a new interest in the outward circumstances of life again, because his faithful living through them did matter so much to his Lord. All Paul's heart is wrapped up in Christ's gospel and in the advancement of Christ's cause ; but he sees that the external circumstances of his life are being made to help on Christ's gospel and Christ's cause—and therefore he comes to regard them with new regard, and to perceive that they are of some account after all. His very imprisonment, about which he has ceased to trouble himself, grows into interest in his eyes once more, since it is being used for that cause about which he troubles himself so much. "Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel." He cares for the circumstances of his life, he is interested in the circumstances of his life, because he is so sure that by them the cause of Christ is served.

And that should be the second point in our view of life, if we be true disciples. Having given up care and interest in our life for ourselves, to feel sure that by our life, be the circumstances of it what they may, Christ is serving the cause of His gospel—and so to find care and interest for our life again. All our life, rightly and faithfully lived, matters to Christ. Whether we be successes or failures, whether we be bond or free, crowned or abased, the things which happen unto us fall out unto the progress—not alone of our own welfare: they fall out unto the progress

of that, too, but that is not our concern—but the things which happen unto us fall out unto the progress of the gospel. It is one of the sublimest exercises of faith to believe that: it is not, perhaps, a very easy thing to believe; but believe it we must, if life is to have its most glorious and most surpassing interest in our sight. Your life and mine, amid all the limitations of them, in the discharge of their little duties, in the faithful carrying of their burdens in the submissive acceptance of their sorrows, in the meek receiving of their successes and in the patient bearing of their failures—our lives matter to Christ. As the apostle's bondage helped on the cause to which his whole heart was given, so does every circumstance of our life—be very sure of it—help on the cause of Him whose disciples we are; and as the apostle, caring nothing about his bondage so far as it affected himself, did care about it since it affected the progress of Christ's gospel, so should we, caring nothing about the circumstances of our life for our own sake, come to care for them since, by our right bearing in the midst of them, they are made to tell in Christ's cause. Hard to see how it is so—yes, we cannot see how it is so. But certain we may be, that by our living, if we live in the true spirit of discipleship, some lasting work is wrought which shall fall out unto the progress of the gospel: unimportant as all chances and changes of circumstance should appear to ourselves, certain we may be that in the progress of Christ's gospel they count for something, for far more than we can know; and the smallest, most circumscribed life may and must communicate

to the Master's cause an impulse through which the triumph and empire of His cause shall be larger and more glorious than without that life it could ever have been. And *that* should be the interest of life for us—the assurance that all things that happen to us fall out unto the progress of the gospel. "To me to live is Christ," and therefore I care not for all that goes to make up my life, since all my interest is in Him; but once again, "To me to live is Christ," and therefore I *do* care for all that goes to make up my life, since by every incident and every experience and every circumstance of it Christ's cause is somehow advanced—and all my interest is in Him. Our life, one might say, interests our Lord, and because it does that, must it have interest for us. Not for our own sakes, but for His, do we turn interested eyes upon the circumstances of life again.

Sometimes we seem to have learnt the lesson that the circumstances and experiences of our days really matter nothing to ourselves, but do not seem to have gone on to the further point that they do matter a great deal to Christ. "To die is gain"—I almost wonder whether Paul would have written those words if he had known how a morbid sentimentality was often going to misinterpret and misapply them. "This life is nothing"—people say—"and to die is gain. Better then to die." No, that is not what Paul said. "To die is gain"—and that was just the very reason why Paul did not want to die. To die would be gain to himself: to live was gain to Christ; and so he turned back from the interest in death to a new interest in life again. Lose, lose by all means,

the interest in life that is an interest merely selfish—but find the fresh interest which cares for life and discerns an importance in life, since life counts in Christ's cause.

And it is a great, a worthy interest indeed. What nobler interest could life have? Christianity has been charged with producing indifference to life: your Christ, they tell us, calls men to turn heart and thought away from the ordinary experiences of our human existence, and to fix heart and thought upon Himself; and so this life is belittled by your Christian discipleship, made to appear of no account. Devotion to the gospel of Christ means inattention and listlessness, it is sometimes said, before the ordinary duties and common affairs which enter into the ordinary and common life of mankind. Nay, far otherwise does the truth stand. Other-worldliness finds no place in the truly Christian conduct of life. Not so to wrap ourselves up in the Christ and in the things of Christ as to be oblivious of the duties and joys and sorrows that visit us, but so to wrap ourselves up in Christ and in the things of Christ as to be the more mindful of duties and joys and sorrows, remembering that by them, by our faithfulness in them, our Lord makes the triumph of His gospel to come. What worthier interest than that could life possess? Christ calls to us, "If all your heart is Mine—if for you to live is Christ—you can best show it by caring, for My sake, for the common experiences of every day." He uses them, and makes them holy so. Christianity produce indifference to life! No, to the Christian disciple everything that enters into

life glows and burns with an interest unsurpassed, for Christ uses it: by his heart's absorption in Christ the Christian disciple is sent back to his life with a care for it which will make him live it out to the full, for Christ uses it; and when we can truly say "To me to live is Christ," then life becomes transfigured and glorified as by selfishness it could never be transfigured and glorified, for Christ uses it. And so Christian discipleship combines the most entire selflessness with the greatest practical sanity, if I may use the word. The more enthusiastic we are in the cause of Christ's gospel, the more will our life, even in the most commonplace incidents of it, come to have worth in our eyes, since by our life and by our faithfulness in life does the cause of Christ's gospel win its way.

And that is the second point in the view of life which a true discipleship should hold. Let our life, which for our own sake has ceased to engross all our interest and our thought, take its place in our interest and thought again for the sake of Christ.

But that is not quite all. Not only did Paul's discipleship to Christ impart a new interest to life for him, but it made him cling to life and want to live. One can seem to follow the current of his thoughts here, as he weighs the prospect of living against the prospect of dying, and finally concludes, "Yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide." Since Christ uses His life for the gospel's advancement, life is not only clothed with fresh

dignity and interest in the apostle's sight, but is made to rouse in him a love and enthusiasm for it. He clung to life, for life was the present opportunity to him of serving and glorifying his Lord.

We stop short of that so often. Even when our discipleship has enabled us to find new interest and meaning in the circumstances of our days, because Christ uses them for His own cause, still we so often just *bear* life, and nothing more. One would suppose, from the tone of even Christian speech and Christian prayer sometimes, that to bear life, to get through it somehow without excessive weariness or pain, is all that Christianity can enable us to do. But Paul, with Roman jailers at his side, loved life and had an enthusiasm for life and wanted to live—so mightily did the knowledge that by his living, even though he lived in bonds, the gospel he cared for was helped on, so mightily did that knowledge inspire his heart. His Master had told him that the things which were happening to him should fall out unto the progress of the gospel; and the apostle, proud to serve a cause so glorious, whether by life or by death, had at once burned and yearned to live. With such a love and enthusiasm for life should Christ inspire His people still Here, in this round of duties, in these successive experiences of gladness and gloom, in all that goes to make up our life—here, in these things, lies our present opportunity of serving and glorifying our Lord: should we not cling to it and love it and make the most of it and concentrate upon it all the earnestness and faithful ardour of our souls?

Do not let us, if we be Christ's, be content with just bearing life as though it were a burden and could not be anything but a burden—a burden which Christ in some measure relieves of its heaviness for us, but a burden still. Have an enthusiasm for life, for it tells in our Lord's cause! Do not let us, if we be Christ's, be content with just getting through life without grumbling or repining at it. Have an enthusiasm for life, fling yourself into life and into the experiences of life with ardour and earnestness, for it tells, tells in our Lord's cause! Not alone are we to bear the load of life the more easily when we have realised how Christ bestows upon life a new interest and meaning for us, but we are to find in the bearing of it a fulness of joy.

So does Christianity, which begins by taking us away from thought about this earthly life of ours, end by bringing us back to thought about this earthly life of ours again—but making us think about it with other purposes and ideals in the thinking. Our life is not lived according to the full Christian view of it until we live it by these thoughts which inspired the apostle's living. First, lose for Christ's sake, the selfish and self-absorbed interest in life: then find, for Christ's sake, a Christly interest in life; and then, for Christ's sake still, love life and cling to life, because by life we serve and glorify Him. How our life, how the world, would be transformed, if only Christ's people lived so! Live thus—there is no room or time then for idle broodings or vain regrets. Live thus—make

life to be one great sacrifice in which you lose yourself to find yourself again. Live thus—for so life becomes an unselfishness in which nevertheless self finds its noblest scope. Live thus—finding life and death to be the same to our confident souls, yet caring for life and clinging to life since it is the nearest, the present opportunity for the service of our Master, and carrying with us the joyful assurance that, living or dying, we are the Lord's.

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